

The
Fairhope Venture



E. N. HOARE, M. A.



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"IT IS RIGHT YOU SHOULD LIFT HIM UP," SAID THE INDIAN, SOLEMNLY.
Frontispiece. *Page 148.*

THE FAIRHOPE VENTURE.

AN EMIGRATION STORY.

BY

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. RUSTIC INCIVILITY ...	5
II. FIRST IMPRESSIONS ...	14
III. A "CATCHING" FEVER ...	27
IV. A FAMILY CONCLAVE ...	38
V. A BITTER AWAKENING ...	48
VI. MAKING A START ...	60
VII. A WEEK IN A LIFE ...	70
VIII. COMPLICATIONS AT PIXLEY ...	84
IX. PREPARING TO "FLIT" ...	95
X. ENSNARED ...	105
XI. THE DREGS OF THE CUP ...	118
XII. THE SHADOW OF FATE ...	127
XIII. IN LONE LAKE SWAMP ...	140
XIV. SEVERED TIES ...	152
XV. ON THE ST. LAWRENCE ...	166
XVI. KINDLY ATTENTIONS ...	176
XVII. IN THE ONCE "LONE LAND" ...	187
XVIII. "FOR THE DEFENCE" ...	196
XIX. BROTHERS ONCE AGAIN ...	208
XX. TRUTH OUT AT LAST ...	219

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXI. THE PIXLEY IMMIGRANTS	230
XXII. UNCLE JAMES DISCOURSES	241
XXIII. FRANK LYNTON'S DIFFICULTIES	251
XXIV. OLD FACES IN NEW SCENES	265
XXV. IN SWIFT PURSUIT	273
XXVI. WAS IT SACRILEGE?	284
XXVII. A WINTER JOURNEY	295
XXVIII. LEFT TO PERISH	309
XXIX. MOOSE-JAW SPEAKS	316
XXX. AN IMPOSSIBLE REQUEST	325
XXXI. AN UNPLEASANT INTERVIEW	335
XXXII. YELLOW PAW'S APPEAL	345
XXXIII. THE TRIAL—UNLOOKED-FOR DEVELOPMENTS	354
XXXIV. CLOSING SCENES—THE END	368





THE FAIRHOPE VENTURE.

CHAPTER I.

RUSTIC INCIVILITY.

“**W**OULD you kindly allow me to pass?”
The voice was low and gentle, but the words came forth with a firmness which seemed to indicate that the speaker was wont to expect and find a ready deference to her behests.

She was a fair young girl, scarce a woman in physical development, yet sufficiently self-reliant and mistress of her own actions; so, at least, any one would have concluded who should have watched her as she moved with firm step and erect carriage across the wide upland pasture field to the point where she now stood. That point was just in front of a low stile that intervened between the path along which the girl had been walking and the lane beyond. Here the girl stood a moment, tapping her foot nervously on the close-cropped sward, while patches of heightened colour flecked her fair cheeks. On the top rail of the

stile two men sat, comfortably smoking—sat squarely and, as it seemed, ostentatiously, with their backs to the field and their faces to the lane.

The moments passed, the tobacco clouds curled up in the still evening air, the well-shod foot ceased its nervous tapping and made a short step forward, the heightened colour became fixed as in surprise or anger, the usually full lips were compressed with exaggerated intensity; then the request—prefaced this time with a formal apology—was repeated.

“I am sorry to trouble you, but would you *kindly* allow me to pass?”

Thus addressed, the two men started and turned round on the rail in real or affected surprise. Then the elder of the pair, taking his pipe from his mouth, held out his hand invitingly.

“Give us your fist, my pretty lass, and I’ll help you over in a giffy.”

The younger man—indeed he was little more than a lad—remonstrated.

“Dry up there, Bully, and let the lady pass;” and he enforced his remonstrance by sharply striking down his companion’s arm.

“What did you do that for, young ’un, I’d like to know? Mayn’t a chap offer his hand to a lady to assist her? or is it jealous you are?”

The other retorted something, and then there ensued a scuffle, half serious, half friendly.

The poor girl looked on for a moment, then, bethinking herself of a gate at the corner of the field, she turned from the path and hurried along by the hedge which effectually shut in the field from the lane beyond.

Hilda Fairhope walked as rapidly as her pride would permit. She was not exactly frightened, but she was bewildered and angry. She had never been thus molested before. From early childhood she had walked alone about her father's parish as though the whole place belonged to her. Every man, woman, and child—and certainly the majority of the cats and dogs—knew and loved her. And now to have been treated with such rudeness in the midst of her own domain! The thing was intolerable and scarcely credible. So Miss Hilda walked towards the gate at the lower end of the field quickly but proudly, and as she went she laughed to herself to think how promptly the tramps would be dealt with and her own dignity vindicated should anything in the shape of a man—ay, were it only the most boorish plough-boy—chance to happen on the scene.

But while Miss Fairhope is consoling herself with visions of a well-timed and more or less chivalric interposition, let us fix her for the reader amid her people and normal surroundings.

The parish of High Pixley, of which the Rev. George Fairhope had now been rector for some dozen years, was situated in that upland part of Kent which presents so strong a contrast in all its characteristic features to the district known as the Weald. Here is no "garden of England," but rather a rolling expanse of pasture-land, diversified by patches of tillage and "shaves" of underwood, extending in waving lines along the hillsides, or filling some miniature valley or "bottom" with foliage. The soil is for the most part poor, and its shallowness is revealed by the white streaks of

chalk-stones that the ploughshare has upturned upon the slopes. It is, too, a streamless, thirsty land, and after a few weeks of summer drought water becomes a scarce and valuable commodity. It has to be drawn for miles, and that over roads as provoking as they are picturesque. It is uphill and downhill all the way, now over a bare, wind-swept crest, now down into some delicious hollow, where the underwood, ready for the woodman's axe, bends above the horse's head in the narrow, deep-sunk lane, or where, the overhanging burden having been cleared away, Nature embroiders her carpet, thus laid bare, with wild flowers. Here, in the morning and evening hours, the young rabbits play through the bracken and round the gnarled stumps of the oft-felled yet fresh-springing hazel, ash, and alder.

High Pixley, like its neighbours, had but a sparse and that too a dwindling population. There was neither town nor railway station within several miles, and the place dignified with the name of "the village" consisted of a wheelwright's shop, a forge adjoining, and the undergamekeeper's cottage, grouped together in a place where three ways met. The parish could not boast a public-house, but it possessed, and in fact was possessed by, a resident squire. This constituted a claim to distinction and conferred a certain importance on Pixley as a rural centre. The hounds met periodically at Pixley Court, there was an occasional shooting-party in the autumn, and a *very* occasional dinner-party during the winter. The sanitary authority was accused of showing special interest in the Pixley roads, and

the rural policeman was seen upon them more frequently than in other parts of his district. The servants from the Court secured a congregation for Mr. Fairhope even in the severest weather, and the necessity for providing for their manifold wants also secured a punctual visitation on the part of the local tradesmen to the rectory, which had the good fortune to be situated within half a mile of the Court. Whoever else might be snowed up when the upland blasts filled the lanes with drifts, the household at Pixley Court could not "go without ;" and thus the folks at the rectory came in for some crumbs of comfort.

Perhaps the above enumeration includes all the advantages that the rectory derived from the proximity of the "great house." On the other hand, there were drawbacks. It made the position of rector more trying for a poor man, and a poor man George Fairhope undoubtedly was. The large staff of servants at the Court emphasized the meagreness of the rectorial establishment. There were neighbouring parishes less well endowed than Pixley, in which the clergyman's household was, at all events, the "most comfortable ;" but here the head gamekeeper, not to say the butler, deemed himself more important than a poor parson who kept no horses, and had to make shift with two indoor domestics. In fine, though there had never been any rupture between the two houses, there had always been a certain sense of restraint. Indeed, upon several occasions, relations had, in diplomatic parlance, become decidedly strained.

Now let us resume our walk with Hilda Fairhope. As has been said, it was more in anger

than in fear that the rector's daughter hurried along beneath the shelter of the hedge. But when she reached the gate her heart fluttered and stood still an instant—there was the ill-conditioned fellow who had already so much annoyed her! The man, who was alone now, was leaning over the top of the gate, pipe in mouth, and gazing straight before him in an evidently assumed fit of abstraction.

Although her heart beat fast, Hilda Fairhope did not pause nor hesitate. Inborn pride and courage came to her aid, and she walked firmly up to the gate and drew back the latch. The gate yielded a couple of inches, but the weight against it resisted further motion.

"Have the goodness to move a little and let me open the gate," said the girl haughtily.

"Excuse me, miss. With all the pleasure in life. Allow me."

Then, as Hilda slipped through and the latch snapped behind her, the fellow continued, but in an altered tone—

"You might help a poor chap, miss, that is down in his luck and out of work."

The girl could not move. The gate had closed behind her, and the tramp had swaggered up close in front and was leering at her with offensive familiarity. She was a little frightened now, but her reply was quite collected and quiet.

"If you are really in need you had better go up to the rectory and see my father; he will help you, if he thinks you deserving. I do not like to be stopped on the road in this way."

"What do I care about your father or his

bloomin' rectory! Can't you give me a trifle out of your pocket? Come, I'm sure you have a bob or two about you, miss." And as he spoke the fellow held out his hand in a fashion that was rather more threatening than supplicatory.

"How dare you speak to me in such a way, you great coward!" cried the brave girl. "Stand aside and let me pass at once, or—or——"

"Or I shall have the pleasure of kicking you into the middle of next week, you unmitigated ruffian."

Miss Fairhope started round and found herself face to face with a gentleman who was standing close by her with a gun beneath his arm. He was a short, light-built man, quite young, of a bronzed and it might be brazen aspect, yet undeniably handsome, and not without something very attractive in the expression of his face. Though his words had been so fierce, he stood perfectly still and unruffled. So sudden was his appearance, that he might have been a waxwork figure shot up from the ground through a trap-door.

The tramp, who was a big, burly fellow, was as startled as Hilda, but seeing that the new-comer was much smaller than himself he soon recovered his courage.

"And what is it to you, I'd like to know, if a poor chap asks a lady for a trifle to help him on his road?"

"You had better put your tail between your legs and run for it, before I break every bone in your body. I've been watching your little game, my friend," replied the motionless figure.

"Ay, it's easy for a fine gentleman like you to

come it over a poor working-man when you've got a gun under your arm. But if you wasn't armed, I can tell you what it is, my little whipper-snapper : I'd do for you, by——”

With the rapidity of lightning the short gentleman rested his gun against the gate, turned up his cuffs, and, stepping forward, administered a slap across the still open mouth of his opponent.

“What's that for?” gasped the man, in sheer astonishment.

“That's for your insolence to me, and the rest will be for insulting this young lady.”

The speaker turned to give a glance at the fair one for whom he was doing champion, but as he did so, the tramp rushed upon him, and with a blow and a kick sent him spinning across the narrow lane.

Miss Fairhope, who had been watching her deliverer with open admiration, was dismayed by this sudden and disastrous assault. The thought even occurred to her in her momentary panic that the proper thing to do would be to take the gun which stood beside her and shoot the tramp. But no such heroic measure was called for. The young man had instantly recovered himself, and was now making such brilliant play round his clumsy and enraged adversary that there could be no doubt of the result. He was evidently a practised pugilist, and in less than five minutes the tramp had received quite as much punishment as he cared for. Muttering mingled curses and apologies, he tried to slink off down the lane ; but the nimble victor caught him by the collar behind and forced him on his knees, till he almost grovelled in the dust.

“Oh, sir, don't treat me like that! You're a

gentleman. Have some consideration for a poor fellow that's hungry. If I did speak rough to the lady, it was because I was hard driv' for a bit to eat and a night's lodging."

"You'll get a night's lodging in gaol, I can tell you, if you are found within five miles of this to-morrow morning, you brute."

And then, with a parting kick to his now prostrate adversary, the young man turned towards Miss Fairhope, unrolled his sleeves, took off his hat, and said quietly, with a charming smile—

"Now I am at your service, miss. May I ask which way you were going?"





CHAPTER II.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

HILDA FAIRHOPE looked in the face of her champion and was at once conscious of a strong inclination to fall in love with him. She was a young girl, full of enthusiasm and romance. She had had no experience of life beyond the limits of home and parish, and society, in the common acceptation of the word, was a thing unknown to her. She was a good girl and had tried to do her duty ; but her life hitherto had been a trying one—not natural, and therefore not altogether wholesome. Hilda was just twelve when her mother died, and thus, having no sister, she found herself when a mere child at the head of her father's house. She had three brothers, of whom two, Donald and Fraser, were several years senior to her, while the third, Cuthbert, was a year and a half her junior.

For three years after her mother's death, Hilda had led a busy yet isolated life. Her brothers were not much company to her. Donald and Fraser were handsome, well-grown lads, without any vices, but apparently destitute of the faculty

that makes for success in life. They were devotedly attached to each other, and till Donald was sixteen and a half and Fraser fifteen, had scarcely spent a day apart. They had gone together to the same provincial Grammar School, and failed together at the Cambridge Local; had come home together, had laughed and played, and together had gone afoot after the Pixley hounds throughout an idle winter. Their father had no means to send them to a good school or to the university, and they were not the lads to make their own way by the leverage of exhibitions and scholarships. During the latter part of Hilda's *régime* as house-keeper, her elder brothers had been engaged in certain futile attempts to meet the requirements of Her Majesty's Civil Service Commissioners in connection with sundry examinations. For many months they had been but little at home.

Nor did Hilda get much solace or companionship out of Cuthbert. He was in those days a regular little pickle, and could seldom be found indoors except when fetched in, *nolens volens*, to his lessons. Those lessons were nominally taught by Mr. Fairhope, but the practical part of getting them prepared, of expounding, explaining, and enforcing, fell upon Hilda—an arrangement for which the young gentleman ought to have been grateful, but which, instead, he highly resented. He could not endure, he said, to be bossed by a girl, and that girl his own sister.

When Hilda was nearly sixteen, a momentous change took place at Pixley rectory. Mr. Fairhope married again—married a widow several years his senior, but endowed with a large jointure.

Had this event occurred sooner, it would, no doubt, have been for the benefit of every member of the family. But now some matters had gone too far to be remedied. Cuthbert, indeed, was promptly packed off to a boarding-school; but the other lads were too old to resume their studies, and what else to do with them could not readily be determined. To find "suitable openings" for half-educated, gentlemanly young fellows without capital is one of the social problems of the day. And poor Hilda, who had come to fancy herself quite a woman and an experienced housekeeper, felt keenly on being deposed from her high estate. Against the proposal that she should be sent for a year or two to a finishing-school, she fought vehemently, and, unfortunately for herself, with success.

But the new state of things had not lasted long. Within a year of her marriage the second Mrs. Fairhope died. For such an unlooked-for contingency the rector had made no preparation. He had talked about insuring his wife's life, but had not actually done so; and now, after having launched out into various extravagances which his wife insisted on, and her income fully justified, he found himself deprived of eight hundred a year. Absolute ruin seemed to stare the unfortunate man in the face. For years he had been straitened in consequence of the steady fall in the value of the tithe and the difficulty of letting the farm, the rent of which used to form a considerable portion of the income of Pixley. Then there had come the welcome relief—the brief interval of affluence, accompanied, alas! by what was considered a

necessary, but temporary increase of liabilities. But now the last state was worse than the first. The rector completely broke down under the blow. An old affection of the throat, that had troubled him in former years, returned in an aggravated form. He almost entirely lost his voice, and for several Sundays had, out of the depths of his poverty and distress, to obtain hired assistance for the discharge of his duties.

It was during the first freshness of this domestic trouble, and only a few weeks after her step-mother's death, that Hilda had gone out for that memorable walk. So it came about that she was in a peculiarly susceptible frame of mind, ready to be touched by any manifestation of sympathy, ready to respond to any act of kindness. Therefore she looked full in the face of her protector, and her blue eyes were brimming with tears as she spoke.

"How can I sufficiently thank you, sir, for your kindness? I have always felt quite safe about here hitherto; we see so few strangers."

He read the significance of her inquiring glance, and answered promptly, with a laugh—

"Ah, you are thinking that I am a stranger, too, as well as that fool that I have just sent on his way rejoicing, or otherwise."

The girl glanced at the gun on which her hand still rested, for she had actually seized it in the moment of panic, when she feared her champion was about to be worsted.

The young man laughed again.

"You needn't fear that I am a poacher. At least, I'm not one by profession, though, 'pon my

word, I believe I'm doing a little in that line just at present."

"I thought perhaps you were a guest at Pixley Court," explained Hilda, stiffly; for, much as she was inclined to admire the young stranger, she felt a little offended at his familiar style of address.

"Oh dear, no," he cried; "I'm not a guest at the Court. For the present, Bob Smeaton, the under-gamekeeper, is my host—and a very good host does Bob make, too—though I believe his missus wishes me further. But excuse me if, before formally introducing myself, I make bold to ask if I have the felicity of speaking to Miss Fairhope?"

"Yes, I am Miss Fairhope," admitted Hilda. And though she felt annoyed, she could not help smiling.

"I thought I was not mistaken. You don't recollect me, but I often used to watch you in church, trying to keep that limb of a brother of yours in order. I could do it nicely through the curtains with which we occupants of the squire's pew used to hide our glory from the gaze of the vulgar throng. Not that there was ever much of a throng in Pixley church in my time. Mrs. Smeaton tells me they have taken away the curtains now; and a very good job, say I. I remember when I was a wee boy speculating whether there would be curtains in heaven."

"Oh, then you are Dick—that is, I mean, Mr. Buckthorpe's nephew!" exclaimed Hilda, in a somewhat awe-struck tone.

"That's about it—Dick-dare-d. Doubtless you have heard of my evil report from the old folks."

"I have heard Mrs. Buckthorpe speak of you

two or three times, but always in the kindest terms," said the girl, gravely.

"Dear old lady! It is more than I deserve at her hands;" and for the first time he spoke with some seriousness of manner. "But," he added quickly, in his former style, "have you not heard the governor on my delinquencies?"

"They say he never mentions your name," said Hilda.

"Well, that shows good taste on his part; for I am sure his language would not be parliamentary if he once allowed the topic to get possession of him."

He laughed at his own facetiousness, but his merriment provoked no responsive smile on the girl's fair face. There was an embarrassing pause; then she spoke.

"I thought—that is, we understood that you were abroad somewhere."

"Oh yes, I've been abroad *everywhere*, and I suppose I ought to be still. But the fact is, as I understand the old boy is wont to lament, the world is too small nowadays; facilities of communication have well-nigh annihilated time and space, as the newspapers say. I'm afraid I'm always turning up, like a bad penny. We have got along a bit since Goldsmith wrote 'The Traveller.' You remember how it begins: 'Remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow.' Well, I've found no corner of this habitable globe too remote to get back from, when I had a mind to; nor, thank goodness, have I ever found myself unfriended. I mostly fall on my feet, or if I don't, there is always a chap ready to pick me up, and proud to do it too. Then, as

for melancholy—that is a ghost I have cut long ago. Nor, to do it justice, have I found the world particularly *slow*. It depends a good deal on a chap himself. What's that the poet says?—'Minds that have nothing to confer find little to perceive.' I used to think Pixley the slowest place on earth, but after to-day I shall never think that again."

All this was rather poor stuff, but Hilda Fairhope was inclined to think it wondrous clever; certainly she had never heard any one speak so fluently before.

"I think I ought to be going home," she said demurely, for she was not unconscious of Dick Buckthorpe's eyes fixed upon her.

"Yes," he assented, "and up the lane will be the shortest way. But do you wish to disarm me, or to save me the trouble of carrying my own gun?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I didn't know—I had forgotten. I took it up when——"

"When you saw me getting the worst of it in the first round with our late departed friend?"

Hilda smiled and blushed.

"It was foolish of me, I know; but I was frightened."

"Don't apologize, Miss Fairhope. I think it was your duty to defend me when it was all your fault that I was taken unprepared."

"My fault, Mr. Buckthorpe?" exclaimed the girl.

"Yes, certainly; I was looking at you when the fellow made that rush at me."

"Ah, you see what comes of not minding your business!" and she smiled and blushed again.

"I have always preferred pleasure to business," he replied. "I remember how uncle caught me at

the very same thing long ago. I was looking at you through the curtain when he came down on my juvenile pate with the edge of his prayer-book. I believe your good father heard the ringing sound on my empty skull, for he looked up and stopped reading for an instant."

Thus engaged in friendly chat they walked to the rectory gate together. Master Dick was a consummate actor, and, when it suited him, a deliberate liar. For instance, there was not one word of truth in that supposed reminiscence of his uncle having hammered his head for peeping at little Hilda through the curtains. But the girl suspected nothing, and was readily borne away on the flow of his plausible and varied talk. For the first time in many weary weeks she clean forgot her domestic troubles; and whenever the audacious Dick found that he had gone too far, he was ready with a specious apology and an appeal, expressed or implied, to a certain old acquaintanceship—an acquaintanceship which, in fact, had never had any existence.

They stood for a few moments by the rectory gate, and then Dick Buckthorpe held out his hand and said, with a winning smile—

"Well, I am glad to see, Miss Fairhope, that you are none the worse for your little adventure; at least you don't *look* any the worse."

"Oh no," she assented eagerly, "I am not one little bit frightened; but, then, I might have been killed if you had not so opportunely come to my rescue."

"Proud to have been of some service, I am sure," replied the young man, retaining the while the

little hand that had been so frankly put in his. "My friends and relations have often been kind enough to tell me I was no use in the world, but in future I shall know that I was born for a good purpose."

"We are all born for a good purpose, and if we would only believe that, our lives would be happier and better," said Hilda, gravely. For she already took sufficient interest in her new acquaintance as to be conscious of a yearning for his welfare and reform.

Dick Buckthorpe sighed. "That is true, Miss Fairhope. Thank you for saying that. I will think about it seriously. But now I suppose I must say good night. I trust I shall have the pleasure of meeting you again before long."

"Oh, I am always about," said Hilda, vaguely. "But do you remain any time at Pixley?"

"That depends. I don't exactly know why I came down, but if I stay on I know quite well why it will be. I foresee that I shall be in no hurry to tear myself from this delightful rural scene, unless some horrible 'pressing engagement' crops up to mar my felicity."

There was a slight pause, and then Miss Hilda, instead of saying good night as she ought to have done, allowed herself to revive the conversation.

"What do you find to do with yourself all day? You must feel it very dull down here after having led such an active life."

"I *have* found it dull, but from this hour it will be dull no more, Miss Fairhope. Then as to how I put in the time; do you know, I can scarcely say. I'm afraid I'm a bit late of a morn-

ing sometimes; then I help Mrs. Smeaton a little."

"Help Mrs. Smeaton!" and the girl laughed at the notion.

"Oh, I assure you I am an awfully useful chap, Miss Fairhope," he replied, with mock gravity. "I've sometimes thought of advertising for a situation as mother's help. I draw water for Mrs. Smeaton, and make up the fire, and peel the potatoes, and once I held the baby."

"Once, Mr. Buckthorpe—only once?" queried Hilda, archly.

"Yes, I left that department after the first essay; the engagement terminated honourably by mutual agreement,—neither baby nor I liked the job."

"And what do you do after you have tidied up and made yourself generally useful?"

"Oh, I take a stroll out and visit some of the farmers. You see, they regard me as the coming man—a sort of king that shall be hereafter. So I'm sure of a welcome and a drop of—of sympathy and gossip. Then when evening comes I generally dodge round some of the shaves with a gun, just to see if any stray rabbit wants to have his case attended to. Sometimes I go with Smeaton, sometimes alone. In future I shall always go alone, and trust for company to good fortune and the kindness of any friend that may chance to be about. Do you often go for a walk in the summer evenings, Miss Fairhope?"

Hilda hesitated. "Yes, I go to see the people in the cottages sometimes, but seldom so late as this. Now I must really say good night, Mr. Buckthorpe."

"Good night, Miss Fairhope," he replied, lifting his hat. Then he added, with affected carelessness, "Perhaps you may be going down by Pixley lane end to-morrow evening; I fancy your walk just now was interrupted."

The colour rushed into the girl's cheek as she half turned to him and answered—

"Yes, perhaps I may—that is, I don't know—I really can't tell."

"Oh, it makes no odds; I only just asked. Good night."

Then he shouldered his gun and walked away.

Ashamed and angry with herself, Hilda hurried up the avenue and entered the drawing room through the French casement that still stood open. To her surprise her father was in the room. He spoke to her at once in a rather querulous tone.

"How late you are, my dear! It is almost dark, and I've been getting quite uneasy about you."

"Uneasy about *me*? Why, father, I never heard you say a thing like that before. You know I am about the country at all hours."

"True, child," he replied; "I suppose it is because I am nervous and out of sorts. But where have you been?"

"I went by Pixley lane end to see Mrs. Marsh."

"Quite right, dear. And how is the poor body?"

The sudden question took Hilda completely aback. For the first time she realized that she had not accomplished the object of her walk. She had never reached Mrs. Marsh's cottage, and, truth to tell, had never thought about the sick woman till this moment. She hesitated, then answered vaguely—

"Oh, she is better—that is, I think she's better."

"Had the doctor been?"

"I don't know—I didn't ask, but he's pretty sure to have been. I was in a hurry. I'll go again to-morrow. But now, if you don't mind, father, I'll go to bed. I am tired and not very well."

"What! without any supper, little girl?" said the rector, kindly; for he was struck by Hilda's embarrassed manner, though in the gathering twilight he could not distinguish the lines on her troubled face.

"Yes; I'll get a glass of milk in the kitchen; that will be enough. Good night." Then, without any warning, she turned back in the doorway, flung her arms round her father's neck, and sobbed out, "Dear, dear dad! I'm so sorry—sorry for all your troubles, sorry you were bothered about me, sorry you are not well."

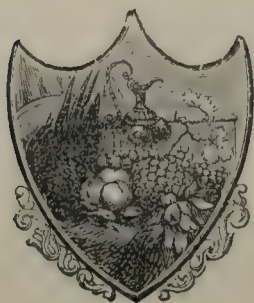
He soothed her tenderly, and then said, laughingly—

"I think it is my little girl who is not well. You do too much, Hilda darling; indeed you have too much put upon you. We ought to try and help you more. Good night, darling, and may God Almighty bless you."

Hilda Fairhope got but little sleep that night. She reproached herself for the encouragement she had given to Dick Buckthorpe. She wept bitter tears to think that she had practically told a lie to her father. She worried herself to know why it was that she had kept back the story of her little adventure. Had young Buckthorpe anything to say to it? or was it because she did not like to add to her father's nervousness by telling him of the

way in which she had been molested? Again and again she told herself that the latter was a sufficient and justifiable motive. But the girl had a tender conscience, and the question *would* recur whether that had been her only or even her primary motive.

So Hilda Fairhope's rest was broken, and her dreams were of evil omen.





CHAPTER III.

A "CATCHING" FEVER.

THOUGH it was summer-time and all was fair around, the gloom was gathering at Pixley rectory. The rector got no better in health, and complications and annoyances of one sort or another seemed to crop up freshly almost every day.

To begin with, Hilda was miserable, and that though she told herself that she was very happy. Miserable! for, alas! the deception into which she had at first drifted heedlessly was now bearing her along, helpless, in its devious course. For a while she cheated herself with the idea that her meetings with Dick Buckthorpe were purely accidental, and she steadily refused to make anything like an assignation with him. But the time quickly came when she had no longer the power to deceive herself. She longed to meet the young man, and day by day she bent her steps in the direction where some hint had suggested he might probably be found. Again and again she told him these meetings must cease. She asked him why he was remaining at Pixley in a state of semi-hiding? why

could he not make his presence known to his uncle and aunt? why should he not call upon her openly at the rectory?

To such inquiries the versatile Dick was always ready with a sufficiently plausible answer. The present state of things would soon terminate; he was only waiting to see how the land lay with his uncle—whatever that might mean; he was longing to reintroduce himself to the dear old rector, whose kindness to him as a boy he could never forget. Only there were certain arrangements to make, certain plans that must be allowed to mature. At one time Dick would look oracular and say that girls could not understand business; at another time he would joke and protest that he was only waiting for a couple of new suits of clothes from London, so that he might emerge from his incognito with becoming splendour. And poor Hilda sighed, and smiled, and coaxed, and scolded, and, ere she was well aware of it, had pledged her troth and, as she fancied, given her entire heart to a worthless young scamp who was afraid to show himself openly, or to come courting her like an honourable gentleman. It was impossible for a girl of Hilda's naturally candid disposition not to exhibit outward indications of the conflict that was going on within. She became moody and uncertain in manner, even as she was from time to time mysterious in her movements. Her father could not fail to notice the change; and this was now added to the burden of other cares—the consciousness that *something* had come between him and his favourite child.

There was also a good deal of trouble with Cuthbert. The boy had come home for the summer

holidays, and there seemed no prospect of his father being able to send him back to the rather expensive school at which he had been placed during the brief flood-tide of domestic prosperity. He was not a bad lad—none of the Fairhopes were—but none the less was he dowered with an unfortunate faculty for keeping himself and all around him in perpetual hot water. To-day it was an altercation with the head gamekeeper over certain rabbit snares or "wires," which the young gentleman maintained he had a perfect right to set anywhere within the limits of his father's glebe ; to-morrow it was some misunderstanding arising out of an undue familiarity with the grooms and stablemen at Pixley Court.

Of the rector's elder sons only Fraser was now at home, Donald having, some months previously, obtained a situation as bank clerk in the nearest provincial town, a piece of good fortune for which he was indebted to his stepmother's influence. Nothing, however, had turned up for Fraser, so, as he was supposed to have some knowledge of farming, or at all events an aptitude that way, he had been established as manager for his father, one of poor Mrs. Fairhope's last acts having been the signing of a cheque for the purchase of eighty lambs, on the care and subsequent sale of which the young man was to try his 'prentice hand.

One August night—how well did Hilda remember it through all after-years!—Fraser arrived home very late. He had been spending a long day in the town where his brother was employed, and the infrequency of local trains, together with the distance of Pixley from a station, rendered an

early return impossible. It was not far from midnight when the young man walked into the library where Hilda had been sitting for several hours with her father, discussing the weary topic of ways and means, and debating about small and, as it too often seemed, futile economies.

"I hope you haven't stayed up purposely for me—though, if you did, it was awfully good of you," exclaimed Fraser.

"Father and I were discussing things in general, and the time slipped by; then we thought we might as well wait a little," explained Hilda.

The rector sighed wearily and skuffled in his chair.

"Yes, it is very late, but I am glad you are safe back, boy. How is Donald, poor fellow?"

"Oh, he is right enough—at least he was this morning; but he was rather feverish when I left him."

"Feverish! He is not ill, I hope—not taken suddenly ill!" exclaimed Mr. Fairhope, who had of late acquired a habit of anticipating evil from every quarter.

"Oh dear, no," laughed the young man; "it is only a sort of emigration fever that we have both caught: indeed, I think my case is the more serious of the two."

"What on earth do you mean, Fraser? you really shouldn't talk riddles at this time of night." And Hilda, knowing how irritable and nervous her father had been throughout the evening, frowned at her brother warningly.

"Well, it is this way," said Fraser, who was too full of his subject to be easily put off it. "We

went after dinner to hear a man lecture about Canada and the great North-West. He had some splendid limelight views and a lot of literature, which latter he distributed 'frank and free' at the conclusion of his discourse. Here's a lot I have brought home to study."

Then he dived into his pockets and produced a bundle of pamphlets, reading the titles as he threw them down on the table: "'Visit of the Tenant-farmer Delegates to Canada in 1890;,' 'An Official Handbook of Information relating to the Dominion of Canada;,' 'Manitoba and the North-West;,' 'The Canadian-Pacific: the New Highway to the Orient across the Mountains, Prairies, and Rivers of Canada;,' 'Alberta as a Field——'"

"Dear me, there is more reading there than you will be able to get through in a month. But what do you mean by emigration fever?" interrupted Hilda, who saw that her father was looking perplexed and tired.

"Just this, that we both want to be off forthwith to make our fortunes. We want to cut the old country; it's played out and over-populated. Just listen to this." And the would-be fortune-maker sprang to his feet, held one of his pamphlets under the lamp, and began to read: "'Free farms for the millions. . . . The Canadian Government gives a free farm of a hundred and sixty acres to every adult male of eighteen years, and to every female who is the head of a family'—so there is a chance for you too, Hilda, if you get married—'on condition of living on it; offering independence for life to every one with very little means, but having sufficient energy to settle. Further and full informa-

tion, in pamphlets and maps, given free, on application by letter, post free, addressed to the "Department of Agriculture, Ottawa, Canada ; or to the High Commissioner for Canada, 17, Victoria Street, London, S.W., England, and all emigration agents." Now, what do you think of that, my girl ? "

"I don't think very much of it, and I'm sure you are bothering father. Don't you think we had better all go to bed, instead of going to Canada ? "

Then Miss Hilda rose and lit one of three bed-chamber candles, which seemed to have been patiently waiting in a row for several hours to be made use of.

"Well, I have no objection to go to bed at present. But don't you think it is a grand idea, father ? I'm sure Don and I would get on like anything. I wish you could have seen the splendid views the fellow showed us of the railway going over the Rocky Mountains. It was magnificent. Imagine being six days in a train ! "

"I can imagine nothing more calculated to drive one mad," said the rector, with a faint smile. "But seriously, Fraser, you must not let yourself get upset by absurd notions of this sort. The idea of *you* going out as an emigrant ! "

"And why not, father ? It seems to me I am just the fellow for it, and so the lecturer thought too. I know I have 'very little means,' and I think I have 'sufficient energy to settle.' "

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense ! you'll think differently in the morning. Let us get to bed now," replied the rector, impatiently, as he took the candle that Hilda had got ready for him.

Fraser was about to add something by way of argument or expostulation, when he was arrested by his sister's entreating and warning glances.

"Well, we shall see what a night's reflection will bring. But I've forgotten to tell you of Donald's adventure. Just imagine old Don having an adventure."

"Oh come, that sounds interesting. An adventure! What was it?" And Hilda, with the candlestick in her hand, turned to listen.

"Well, it seems that on Monday morning last, when returning to business, just at the other side of the garden hedge, in the path that leads to the wood, Don ran up against a chap with a gun. Seeing it was so early, not quite seven o'clock, he thought he had a right to ask him who he was, and what he was doing."

"Certainly," said Mr. Fairhope, who seemed to have become suddenly interested; "it is right on the glebe land, and I don't see what business even Mr. Buckthorpe's gamekeepers would have there."

"But it appears it was not the gamekeeper."

"Who was he, then? And what business had he carrying a gun on the glebe?" demanded the rector.

Fraser laughed.

"A mysterious stranger. Donald could get nothing out of him. At first it appears he was inclined to talk tall and cut up rough, but when Don explained who he was he clomb down and became quite civil. He was a shabby sort of chap, but still Don considers he had the manners of a gentleman. He point-blank declined to tell his name, but said that he was connected with the squire.

So then Don clomb down in turn, apologized, and said he supposed he was staying at the Court. He didn't exactly say that he was ; but Don told him it was all right, and so they parted. I wonder who the fellow was. He seems to have had cheek enough for anything."

"Was he a short, handsome fellow, but with a disagreeable expression about the eyes?" said the rector.

"I didn't see him ; but that is how Donald describes him."

"It must be that unfortunate fellow, Dick, the squire's nephew. I had heard a rumour of his being seen about, but could hardly believe it. I was told that he was trying to borrow money from the farmers, or to get his aunt to pay him to go abroad again. It is a dreadful pity ; he was such an attractive lad, and his aunt used to be so fond of him."

"He seemed a plausible sort of chap, and attractive enough too—after a fashion," said Fraser. "But do you think, then, that he is not really stopping at Pixley Court?"

"Stopping at Pixley Court!" exclaimed the rector. "Why, I believe Mr. Buckthorpe would shoot or horsewhip him if he caught him near the place. It is dreadful to see any man professing Christianity so savagely resentful. I ventured to remonstrate once or twice, but it was no use."

"Why, what has the fellow done to deserve shooting, or even horsewhipping?" inquired Fraser.

Mr. Fairhope glanced at his daughter as he replied—

"I should not like to believe, or even repeat

much that I have heard ; but I know enough, of my own knowledge, to account for his uncle's indignation, if not exactly to justify his resentment."

"But he will inherit the Pixley estate, will he not?"

"Yes, and that is just what makes Mr. Buckthorpe so furious—for I can use no milder word. It is really a very sad business, and I can only pray that the day may be long distant when Richard Buckthorpe shall reign at Pixley. I am glad, if he is about, that the wretched fellow has at least been ashamed to show himself at the rectory."

Poor Hilda, she could stand no more. She had laid her candle down to listen to the tale of her brother's "adventure," and her quivering, agonized face was shaded from observation. She took one step forward with the intention of putting her arms round her father's neck and sobbing out the sad story of the foolish entanglement into which she had been betrayed. But the presence of her brother made her ashamed, and she stood and listened to the conversation to the bitter end. Then she took up her candle, just managing to control her voice as she turned towards the open door.

"Good night. I am awfully tired and sleepy. Put out the lamp when you are done talking."

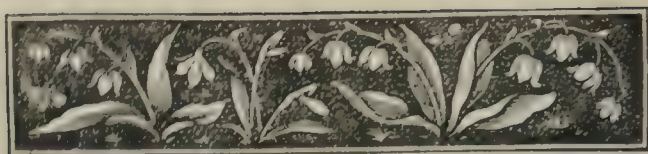
Long and bitterly did Hilda Fairhope weep that night. It was a struggle such as leaves its mark for life ; but out of that struggle she emerged victorious. For a time, indeed, she essayed to vindicate herself. What had happened had not been of her seeking. It had come by chance or fortune. She had done nothing intentionally wrong.

How could she have helped herself? Could she have been rude to one who had done her a signal service? Could she refuse to recognize him when they chanced to meet again? What prudery it would have been to fight shy of a young man in her own rank of life, and who had quite as much right to walk about the Pixley lanes and woods as she herself had! And was it not highly probable that poor Dick had been cruelly maligned? Had not her father admitted that the squire's wrath was altogether preposterous and unchristian? And he himself had had nothing definite to say against Dick—at least he had said nothing. But such arguments brought but a fleeting solace. Reaction would set in; and the poor girl would bury her blushing face in the pillow and bite her lips at the thought of how she had lowered herself in her own estimation by petty deceits and quibbles; how she had compromised herself with a man of whom no one had a good word to say; and, above all, of how she had proved false to the perfect trust that her father had always placed in her truthfulness and discretion.

It was this last thought that pierced the tender heart and conscience of the girl most cruelly. Once she even sprang from her bed with set purpose to go to his room and tell him all. But her father was ill; he was anxious and troubled about many things; why should she add yet another distress to the weight of his burden? Would it not be a worthier atonement, sparing him, to fight out the conflict of her redemption and to learn the lesson of her vanity alone? So the hurrying steps were stayed, and the white figure

stood for a minute, motionless, in the grey twilight of the summer morn. Then the young girl sank on her knees beside the bed, and poured out her trouble before that never-wearying Father whose eyes are in every place "beholding the evil and the good."





CHAPTER IV.

A FAMILY CONCLAVE.

A NIGHT'S reflection—supposing him to have reflected — brought no change of purpose to Fraser Fairhope. At breakfast he was as full of the scheme as he had been the night before ; throughout the early dinner he could talk of nothing else ; by evening-time he had become insufferable. Hilda was depressed and absent-minded ; the rector, dubious and bewildered ; from Cuthbert alone was sympathy to be had.

But that young gentleman had an amendment to propose, and when the family was gathered for early supper he proposed it in due form.

"It is a grand idea this of yours, Fraser, but there is one thing I object to, and that is your choosing Don for a 'pardner.' I don't think he is the sort of chap to make a successful emigrant ; and, besides, he has got a berth of his own at present. It seems to me that this child is the man for your job."

"You !" exclaimed Fraser, laughing ; "why, what good would a boy like you be out there, I'd like to know ?"

"Well, I think I know as much about ranching and the great North-West, and all that sort of thing, as some of your stay-at-home would-be farmers do, who never open a book except when they want to get a good sleep," retorted Cuthbert.

"Now, young 'un, don't be impertinent, but just tell us what you would be able to do out yonder for your living. You see, you are too young to get a grant of land for yourself, according to the regulations ;" and Fraser smiled and spoke softly, after the irritating fashion of elder brothers who delight to rile their "cocky" juniors.

"Now, don't tease Bert, there's a good fellow !" remonstrated Hilda.

"Oh, he is not teasing me, I assure you," said the boy, with fine scorn. "You want to know what use I would be, Fraser. Well, I think I'd be more *in it* than some chaps I could mention at an annual 'round up,' if you know what that is."

"Yes, I admit you can ride a bit," admitted Fraser, who, fortunately for his own dignity, had discovered that very morning from one of his hand-books what sort of a thing a "round up" was.

"Thank you, brother mine. So I can 'ride a bit' ! Well, I would like to see *you* rise and ride Vindictive, for all the town to see, to the tune of, 'Lorraine, Lorraine, Lorce,' as your boy-brother did this very afternoon."

"What do you mean, sir?" interrupted Mr. Fairhope. "I do trust you have not been getting into any fresh scrapes with Mr. Buckthorpe's grooms and horses."

"Well, father, if I didn't get into a scrape, I've to thank myself and my good luck. It happened

on this wise : I was walking along the church road after dinner, intent on my own cogitations and with no desire to court publicity in any way, where I chanced to meet Cleaver, the head groom at Pixley Court. He was riding that renowned beast, Vindictive, of whom it is currently reported that he has never let any one but Cleaver on his back since the lamented dare-d-Dick left his country for his country's good. What the squire keeps the brute for, nobody knows. Some say it is in the devout hope that he will yet break Dick's neck for him ; but I should think it is because nobody can be found to buy such a notorious character. Well, Cleaver got down to do something to the horse's girths, and while we interchanged a word of friendly greeting, the old gentleman himself appeared on the scene. He was in a facetious vein, and asked if I would like a mount. I said I should have no objection if there was a good horse going about anywhere. 'There's Vindictive—try him,' he said, with a knowing look at Cleaver. I didn't care for the job, I can tell you ; but I wasn't going to have our family sat upon by those Pixley Court people ; so I took the old chap at his word and scrambled into the saddle. Then, I say ! didn't I have a high old time, you bet. The brute first stood on his head and polkaed on his front feet ; then he stood on his tail and danced a hornpipe ; after that he got his four legs together, leaped up, and came down with a thud on the hard road, that nearly jerked my teeth through the top of my skull. That riled me a bit, so I let him have my mind in the shape of a couple of cuts with the whip. His retort was to bolt—

which he did, right down Finch Lane, and, the gate being shut at the bottom, I gave myself up as a gone coon—a coon, too, that had not even the alternative of coming down peaceably. But Master Vindictive, for all he was pretending to be in such a fury, knew what he was up to. He saw the gate as well as I did, and he just cleared it flying. I never saw anything so splendid, and I wouldn't have missed it for a hundred pounds. After that, I knew I was all right, because I had only to guide him round and round the big twenty-acre meadow till he had had enough. Then he trotted up to the gate, where Mr. Buckthorpe and Cleaver were standing, and walked out like a lamb. And then do you know what happened—the most wonderful thing of all?”

“What?” demanded Hilda and Fraser in the same breath, while the rector blinked his eyes and twisted his hands nervously, trying to conceal the intensity of his paternal pride.

“Then,” said Bert, calmly, “as I got down and Cleaver got up, the old gentleman—old Grab-all Buckthorpe, as they call him—actually tipped me a sovereign, and said if ever he wanted a steeplechase rider he knew where to look for one.”

“And you pocketed the family pride and the sovereign along with it?” cried Fraser.

“Certainly,” was the magnanimous response. “I took it in the spirit in which it was given, and to show that I bore no malice, even though he had done his level best to get my neck smashed.”

“And did you make up that bit of poetry for the occasion—that rhyme about ‘Lorraine, Lorraine, Lorce’?” continued Fraser, who always took a

pleasure in drawing out and trying to crush what he called "the unbridled bumptiousness" of his younger brother.

Cuthbert laughed.

"Oh, brother mine, your education has been sadly neglected. I can't claim the rhyme—I wish I could. No; the author of 'Lorraine, Lorraine, Lorce' was one Charles Kingsley, of whom you may have heard. It tells the tale of a brutal bully who insisted on his fair young wife getting up betimes and essaying to ride a vicious horse. She remonstrated in vain, and, as she anticipated, got duly killed. It's a pretty poem, but no fellow knows what it means—a circumstance which, of course, adds immensely to its value. The said Charles Kingsley wrote various other things, including 'The Water Babies,' which I might read to you when we are frozen-up in winter in the great lone land."

"Thank you. That would be very nice—readings from the 'Water Babies,' by one of themselves. It would put a fellow to sleep after a hard day's work," assented Fraser.

Thus the conversation continued, with plenty of chaff and fun upon the surface, but underneath there was a growing definiteness of purpose and a proportionate sadness of anticipated separation.

At the end of the week Donald came over, as was his custom, to spend Sunday with his family; and thus another head and another voice was added to the domestic conclave. It appeared, however, that the elder brother had already worked off a good deal of the "emigration fever;" or it might be more correct to say that his judgment had put a curb on his impulse.

"You see, Fraser, my boy," he said to his disgusted brother, "you have nothing to lose, except it be more money over this wretched farming business, but I have."

"Why, you are nothing but a skinny old bank clerk," interrupted Fraser, with supreme contempt. "One would think, to hear you talk, you were a manager, or at least a cashier or something of that sort."

"Well, my screw isn't anything very splendid, I admit," replied Donald, modestly, "but it is something worth holding on to in the present impecunious state of the governor's affairs. Besides, it would be rather rough on the poor pater for you and I to go off and leave him with only Hilda and Bertie."

"Then I suppose I must go alone," said Fraser, sadly, "because going I am. I've got a letter from the Allan steamship people in Liverpool, all about fares and sailings. I had thought of going steerage, but they say I can get ever so much better accommodation in the 'intermediate' for two or three pounds more. The sailings are every Thursday, and I had thought of securing a berth aboard the *Parisian*, which is the best vessel of the lot, for this day three weeks."

"Why, Fraser, you seem to have the whole thing cut and dried!" exclaimed Donald.

"Well, you see, there is no time to lose if one wants to get fixed before winter. I've done something more, too; I've found out about the chaplain."

"Chaplain! The company doesn't appoint a parson to look after the emigrants, surely!"

"No; but the Christian Knowledge Society does. It seems a man named Sharples is going out in the *Parisian*, and I am sure he is an old chum of the governor's."

"How did you find out all this?" inquired Donald.

"I just wrote, as the man who lectured said any fellow might do, to the Emigration Secretary, S.P.C.K., St. Nicholas' Vestry, Liverpool. You see, I thought it might cheer the pater up a bit to know that the moral and spiritual wants of his boys would be provided for. Of course, if I go alone, it does not so much matter, seeing I am such a steady sort of chap. But with a scamp of a fellow like you, Don, it would have been different."

Donald Fairhope made no response to his brother's pleasantry, and the ringing of the bell for morning service brought that particular conversation to a close.

Throughout the Sunday Donald was in a meditative, not to say moody, state of mind. At the close of the afternoon service he took Hilda for a walk, and, finally, at the supper-table, the outcome of their confabulation became apparent.

Fraser had plunged in *medias res*, and was talking about his plans and projects, as he nearly always was now in his waking hours—and sometimes in his sleeping ones too—when Hilda burst in—

"Why not let us *all* go, father—a sort of *Kent* Family Robinson? It would be quite romantic, and awfully jolly, I'm sure."

"What! and leave your poor old father?" exclaimed the rector.

"Oh no, of course not, dad. Why, you are the principal part of the 'all.' We wouldn't be a family in any proper sense without you; we'd be a concourse of atoms banging each other about."

"But you don't want me to give up my living and go out as an emigrant at my time of life! I never heard of such a mad idea."

"Well, it's this way, sir," interposed Donald, to whom his father always listened with patience. "Hilda and I have been talking matters over, and it seems as though the present state of things could not continue long. There seems no way of making anything out of the glebe land, and if you have to pay a curate permanently the living will not be worth anything to you. Now, if you made up your mind to resign, and everything was sold up, I suppose six or eight hundred pounds would be realized."

"Yes, with fixtures, furniture, and stock, there might be that," assented Mr. Fairhope, who seemed to be quite taken aback by the boldness of the proposal.

"Well, that would cover all expenses, and leave plenty in hand towards establishing us in a new home," concluded Donald.

"And then we should not have to be separated; you would keep us all in order, and it would be our pride and happiness to make everything comfortable round you," said Hilda, tenderly, as she put her arm round her father's shoulder.

There seemed something not unattractive in the picture to Mr. Fairhope, for he smiled and remained silent. But Fraser and Cuthbert were not slow to condemn the project.

"A nice lot we'd be," cried the latter, "to go and live in a log shanty—for that is the way all settlers have to begin! Why, father would get his death of cold, and Hilda would be frightened out of the little wits she has."

"And then this plan would take months to carry out. Nothing could be done till next year," urged Fraser.

To this Donald and Hilda at once assented; they said that spring was the proper time to emigrate.

"All right," continued Fraser, "only I'm not going to wait till spring. I'll go on now as a pioneer and get things ready for you. I can report on the country, and find out the best place to settle. I don't mind roughing it a bit, and it will save Hilda and father no end of bother and hardship."

This idea seemed so reasonable that it soon became the nucleus of an animated discussion. Fraser produced his map, and the whole family bent over it, pointing here and there, asking questions, hazarding conjectures. Even the rector became interested as his son descanted on the wondrous course of the Canadian Pacific Railway, traced the winding of the "Red River of the North," pointed out the once remote Saskatchewan and the still distant Peace and Mackenzie rivers.

"It is somewhere up there that your uncle James is stationed," said Mr. Fairhope, as he let his finger wander across the map towards the Great Slave Lake. "He used to get letters but once in two years when he first went there, and even now it is a matter of many months."

"Oh, I must look him up," cried Fraser. "There is a railway to Edmonton now, and it doesn't look very far from there on the map, does it?"

And then they all began to remember that they had quite a number of friends in Canada, or if not exactly friends, then friends of friends or connections of acquaintances. True, one was in Montreal, another in Vancouver, a third in Winnipeg, and a fourth somewhere in Alberta; but what of that? The country was large but the population sparse, and Fraser would be sure to come on most of the people named sooner or later. "People are always turning up in such unexpected ways," said Hilda, who had never yet been twenty miles from Pixley.

And thus they planned and chatted in the quiet Kentish rectory while the twilight thickened around them and the tardy night drew on. That is to say, the young people did the talking, and Mr. Fairhope glanced in mild surprise from one to the other, and wondered if he were about to be transported, despite himself, into some strange new land. And it seemed to him as though he were dreaming of something that had happened long years ago.





CHAPTER V.

A BITTER AWAKENING.

Poor Hilda Fairhope! how she longed now for a mother's—or even a step-mother's—sympathy and advice! So far as companionship of her own sex was concerned, the girl had led a singularly lonely life. She had but few relations and no near neighbours, except Mrs. Buckthorpe. As yet, however, she had not consciously felt her need; indeed, she used to boast of not caring for other women, professing herself perfectly happy with her father and brothers.

But now everything was changed. A new life, a life with infinite possibilities of joy and sorrow, was being revealed to this hitherto innocent child, and in presence of that revelation she felt frightened and half ashamed. In her very simplicity and unsuspecting frankness she had become entangled in the meshes of a deceit, against which her whole soul revolted. Every day that passed seemed to make it more difficult to confide in her father, while her brothers were not to be thought of in such a matter. Once she took a desperate reso-

lution to go and tell the whole story to Mrs. Buckthorpe, but somehow that good lady, though she had many excellent points, was not one to invite confidence. She was a sharp, wizened little woman, several years older than her husband, and looking even older than she was. That she was really of a kind heart and generous disposition Hilda had proved by personal experience; but there was a certain peevishness of manner and severity of tone that rendered approach—especially on the part of one who should have a fault to confess—a formidable affair. Besides, Hilda feared that Dick might get into trouble and further disgrace should she be the first to inform his aunt of his presence at Pixley.

There remained nothing for it, then, but that Hilda Fairhope should act for herself, in reliance on her own judgment; and this she resolved to do without delay. But how was she to communicate with young Buckthorpe? She feared to meet him, lest her determination to break off the intimacy should fail in presence of his subtle persuasiveness; from committing herself to writing she instinctively shrank back. Thus the days passed, and Hilda, dreading an encounter with Dick, confined herself almost entirely to the rectory grounds. Her father, noticing this, remarked on it one afternoon.

"Are you not well, Hilda dear? You seem scarcely ever to go out now."

"Why, I've been out all the morning; whatever can you mean?" was the rather petulant response.

"Oh, I don't mean going about the yard and garden," explained Mr. Fairhope; "but you used

to be so fond of long walks and of visiting the people, and now all of a sudden you have dropped off."

"There has been a lot to do at home, and perhaps I have been rather tired lately. But is there anywhere particular you want me to go?" And she came and leant on her father's shoulder from behind, as she had been wont to do since childhood.

"Well, I think it would be nice if you were to go and see old Mrs. Marsh, dear. I was there to-day, and she was asking about you. She is very feeble now, and I fancy thinks you are neglecting her."

"I'll go now, father dear—that is, as soon as ever I have given you a cup of tea. I *have* neglected the old lady, and it is very naughty of me."

Half an hour later Hilda was on her way to Mrs. Marsh's cottage. An idea had suddenly struck her while her father was speaking, and she had taken her resolution at once. Here was the friend and adviser for whom she had been longing. Whom better could she trust than this dear old woman, who had prayed for her and taken a motherly interest in her as long as she could remember? She lived alone and was no gossip, yet she had an open ear and a kindly word for every one in trouble. Her placid though deeply lined face reflected the inner beauty of a soul naturally refined, now purified by the Divine discipline of suffering and endurance. As Hilda Fairhope hurried along with lightened heart and ever-quickenened step, she wondered that she had not thought of Mrs. Marsh before. Her only fear now was lest she should come upon Dick Buck-

thorpe by the way, nor did she feel quite safe till her hand rested on the garden gate in front of the old woman's cottage.

Mrs. Marsh was in an unusually communicative mood, and for a long time Hilda found no opportunity for telling the story of her personal trouble and perplexity. She waited patiently and affected interest, but none the less she was not able to deceive the keen old woman.

"There, my dear, I am wearying you. It's small interest my old rambling tales can have for a young lady like you, whose life is all in the present. But I do like to see you sitting there with your sweet face, and it's a pleasure to have you to talk to."

"Oh no, dear Mrs. Marsh ; you do not weary me," exclaimed the contrite Hilda. "I was just thinking how lonely you must be. Why doesn't your daughter in America come home and take care of you ? She is not married, is she ?"

"Ah, don't speak of that, miss—don't speak of that ; it makes the old wound bleed again," was the quick response.

"I didn't know—I am very sorry !" stammered Hilda.

"You never heard about my poor child. Well, yes, it would be before your time—almost eight years ago now. She was but a slip of a girl, silly and too confiding, and so she left me. After all, it's better she shouldn't come back to have things cast in her teeth. I hear from her sometimes, and she says she is comfortable ; ay, and she has sent me money more than once, poor darling."

There was a pause, and then Hilda said abruptly—

"Do you know anything about Mr. Buckthorpe's nephew?"

How often have we experienced the sensation of a word "being taken out of our mouth"—one's very thought being voiced by another—and that without any obvious train of thought or association of ideas to account for the coincidence!

Mrs. Marsh started forward and regarded her questioner with a keen, searching scrutiny.

"Do I know anything about Dick Buckthorpe? It's not mocking me you are, surely, dear Miss Fairhope, when you ask that question. No, no, that's not possible. But tell me, *do you* know anything about this man whose name you have mentioned?"

"Yes," stammered Hilda, "I have met him, and—and—I wanted to know——"

"You have met him—not at Squire's?" cried the old woman, with flashing eye.

"No."

"Nor yet at your father's—he has not dared to cross the rectory threshold?"

The girl drooped her fair head as the quick-coming colour mounted to her very forehead.

"No, he has not called at the rectory, not yet. I met him first by chance. He did me a service. He told me who he was, and—and—I have met him again. I wanted to tell you about it, dear Mrs. Marsh, because I am very troubled." Then, as she felt the gentle touch of the old woman's hand on her arm, she fairly broke down and burst into tears.

After that the confession did not take long to make. When it was ended, a few whispered words

caused Hilda to start to her feet. There was no hesitation now : burning indignation glowed on the cheek and flashed from the eye, while the little foot tapped impetuously on the floor.

"Thank you, dear Mrs. Marsh, for your sympathy and for your confidence. I shall know how to act now. But I must be going, for it is getting quite dark ; and since father has been ill, he has grown fidgety about me when I am out late. Good night."

Hilda Fairhope walked from the cottage with erect, proud carriage. She had no fear ; indeed, she wished rather than otherwise that Dick Buckthorpe might cross her path while yet the flame of her indignation and scorn was at its highest. During the last half-dozen days she had written at least as many letters to this man. They had varied in tone and length, from the briefest note of formal dismissal to a closely written, soft-hearted rigmarole about her feelings, motives, good wishes for his future, and so forth. None of these epistles had been sent, and all except two had been destroyed. These were now destined to follow the others, for already one final utterance of concentrated scorn and bitterness was being composed. She would write it that very night. She would post it before she went to bed. No, she would call and leave it in person at Smeaton's cottage. She would make assurance doubly sure, and avoid even an hour's delay. There could be no peace for her, no self-respect, till she had severed the last cord of this wretched entanglement.

Thus planning things with herself, Hilda walked briskly towards home. She had just reached the

very gate at which she had first seen Dick Buckthorpe, when a slight, but evidently intentional, cough roused her attention. She looked up with a start, and there, close beside her, stood a man with a gun under his arm. Not doubting but that it was her sometime lover, the girl drew up reluctantly, trembling, but determined.

"I'm afraid I've given you a bit of a start, miss. I humbly beg your pardon."

Then Hilda perceived that it was not Dick, but Smeaton the gamekeeper, who stood before her.

"Yes, you did startle me; I did not hear anything, and—and—you stood so still."

"You see, miss," said the man, apologetically, and yet with a tone of familiarity that the rector's daughter was inclined to resent, "softly is the word in our business, and I suppose we get to be a bit catlike in our ways without knowing it. But I'm glad I've come across you, miss, for I've got something here that will interest you."

Then, glancing round knowingly, as though it were necessary to guard against observation, he produced a note from the pocket of his shooting-jacket and held it forth in a gingerly fashion, as though it were alive.

Hilda felt very angry. Her first inclination was to refuse to take the letter and to order Smeaton about his business pretty sharply, but, after a momentary struggle, she controlled herself. Her woman's instinct told her that it would not be politic to betray any strong emotion, or to make a fuss over what might, after all, have been a trifling and innocent affair. So she took the letter, just saying quietly—

"Oh yes, it is from Mr. Buckthorpe, I suppose ; he might just as well have sent it by post."

Bob Smeaton was surprised and disappointed, but still he was anxious to maintain the importance of his office as a confidential go-between.

"Mum's the word, miss," he whispered, as he put his finger to his lips hurriedly ; "gateposts have ears sometimes, and you never know but that there may be a two-legged fox about."

"There is no need of secrecy. I, at least, am not ashamed of what I do," said Hilda, haughtily, as she ravelled up the flap of the envelope with her thumb.

Seeing that he was making himself offensive, Smeaton, who, like every one else at Pixley, was devoted to Hilda, at once changed his tone.

"I didn't mean no offence, Miss Hilda, and there is no one could suspect you of doing wrong ; but, you see, young Mr. Buckthorpe doesn't care for it to be known in general that he is about here. There has been some trouble between him and his uncle."

"Yes, I can understand that—but it is his affair, not mine. I will probably send an answer to this letter in the morning. Good night, Smeaton."

Hilda expected the man to open the gate and stand aside to let her pass ; but instead of doing so, he fumbled about and hesitated.

"If you don't mind, miss, I'll just walk up to the rectory gate with you : it's getting dark, and I suspect there is one or two rough chaps about."

"Oh, I'm never afraid ; you needn't mind," exclaimed Hilda. Yet, even as she spoke, a chill sensation of fear crept over her, and she was con-

tent enough to see the stalwart form of Bob Smeaton, his gun now resting on his leather-protected shoulder, by her side.

"Well," she said, after they had passed through the gate, "perhaps it is better ; my father gets uneasy about me, and I *was* spoken to by a tramp just here, a few weeks ago."

"Yes, I heard about that," assented Smeaton, slowly. "I wish I had been within range ; it might have saved a lot of bother."

Hilda Fairhope made no reply, but she bit her lips with mortification. How could the game-keeper have heard of her little adventure ? *She* had not breathed a word of the matter to anybody, and it was not likely that the tramp had told upon himself. There remained but one other person who had been present.

For a short distance the footpath to the rectory lay through a dense piece of underwood, called, for some forgotten reason, "the curate's shave." It was a very lonely place, on a steep slope. At the lower side of the shave was a chalky, ploughed field, and beyond it an extensive pasturage spreading over the crest of the hill. A stile of two steps, set in the wattle fence, afforded access from the field below, while at the further end, that nearest the rectory, there was a little wooden gate. The steep bit of path between was narrow and worn down by winter rains.

Having reason to be displeased with herself, Hilda Fairhope felt cross with everybody else. Though willing to accept protection, she was in no mood for companionship : so she hurried on in front of Smeaton and got over the easy stile

unassisted. Then she found herself alone, for either accidentally or of set purpose, the gamekeeper had lingered behind. Up the rough path the girl made her way. Everything was perfectly still save for the rustling of the trees that met above her head and the rattling of the dry pebbles displaced by her feet. Suddenly the feeling came over her that she was being watched. She stood still and glanced round nervously. For the most part the thicket was composed of slight saplings of ash or hazel crowded together, but here and there an oak that had been spared through successive fellings had attained to considerable thickness. Partly concealed by one such tree, Hilda was now sure she could detect the figure of a man. She uttered a sharp cry, and then, even as the figure sank down out of sight, she heard behind her the crunching of heavy nailed boots, and Smeaton's voice calling out—

“It's all right, miss; I am close here. Is there anything up?”

Hilda told the gamekeeper what she had seen, but to her surprise he made light of it, and plainly said that she must have been mistaken.

“But you said yourself that there were some tramps or people of that sort about,” urged the girl.

“Ay, but it isn't hereabouts they'd be. Anyways, there is no man behind yon tree now.” Then, lightly whistling a tune, he pushed forward and opened the gate in front, and waited for Hilda to pass through.

The rectory gate was soon reached, and there the gamekeeper wished the young lady a respectful yet hearty good night.

"It would have been no more than he deserved if I had put a charge of shot into him," soliloquized Bob Smeaton, as he uncocked his gun and turned his steps homeward.

As for Hilda, she was in a fever to get unnoticed to her room. Once there, she locked the door, unfolded the letter, and read :—

"DEAR MISS FAIRHOPE,

"This is to say farewell! The venerable female relative, of whom you have often heard me speak in such eulogistic terms, has given yet another proof, alike of her generosity and of the interest she takes in her nephew. Only there is this condition attached to her bounty, that I must tear myself from the charms of Pixley within twenty-four hours. She little dreams how intense those charms now are for me! Willingly would I linger on in what has been for me an enchanted paradise, but I have no choice—I must obey. So I start for Canada to-morrow. The time may come—who knows how soon, for is not life proverbially uncertain?—when I shall return under happier auspices. And then—well, we shall see what will happen then!

"Good-bye; sometimes spare a thought for one who will not cease to think of you.

"DICK."

Hilda deliberately tore the letter into narrow strips, each of which she then burnt in succession at the flame of her candle.

"The wretch," she said aloud; "to think that by my hesitation and delay I should have left it in

his power to insult and throw me over thus ! What would I not give to let him know to-night how I hate and scorn the very thought of him ! Yes, I hate him, and I hate myself, and I know in futur I shall hate Pixley too."





CHAPTER VI.

MAKING A START.

FRASER FAIRHOPE pushed forward his preparations with more vigour than any one would have expected of him. He also displayed considerable judgment and self-restraint. He discarded many attractive things in the way of outfit, having resolved not to take one sovereign more from his father than was absolutely necessary.

"I don't want to have more than two pounds in my pocket when I arrive in Winnipeg, and then I won't be worth robbing," he said cheerfully. "If I should need a few dollars later on for any hopeful-looking enterprise, I know you will help me all you can, father."

"That I will," replied Mr. Fairhope; "and believe me, dear boy, if we are never to meet again in this world, I shall not forget the self-denying thoughtfulness that you have displayed in this matter. I pray that God Almighty may prosper the work of your hands upon you, and keep you safe from the manifold dangers to which you will be inevitably exposed."

"Oh, father, I shall be right enough. Every one says that if a fellow doesn't drink and keeps his eyes open he is sure to get on."

Mr. Fairhope looked wistfully into his son's frank, fearless face. So far as moral conduct was concerned, the lad had never caused him an hour's anxiety ; and if hitherto his career had been ineffective in a worldly point of view, the father was quite ready to attribute that to the force of circumstances and to an imperfect education, for which he held himself to be in a sense responsible. Certainly it was not the young man's fault that he had not had better opportunities. Nevertheless, Mr. Fairhope sighed ; he felt that with all his good and attractive qualities, there was something, nay, it might be a good deal, deficient in Fraser's character and in the spirit with which he was entering on his present venture.

"You must beware of over-confidence, my boy. Courage and self-reliance are great qualities, but the firmest foundation of moral strength is laid in the consciousness of weakness. Many a young fellow goes forth into life full of high resolves and generous aspirations, and falls through over-confidence, and because he neglects to seek strength and wisdom where alone they are to be found."

"Why, father, you are a Job's comforter !" remonstrated the young man. "If one was to be always looking on the gloomy side of things there would be no spirit left in a fellow to carry him through."

"I do not want you to look on the gloomy side—far from it," said Mr. Fairhope, earnestly ; "it is the bright side I want you to look at ; for what is the bright side of all earthly things save that which

reflects for us the working of our heavenly Father's providence and love? Oh, Fraser, now that you are leaving us to go out into the great world, I want you at every turn to seek God's help and guidance. You can only be strong in Him, you can only be safe in Him. Do not neglect your prayers or your Bible, and do not forget the Church of your baptism. When opportunity offers, avail yourself of her ministrations and help forward her work—a work conducted amid many difficulties."

"I shall not forget what you have said, sir. I will strive to do what is right and what would please you," replied Fraser, gravely. Then, feeling somewhat embarrassed at the turn the conversation had taken, he continued, "You promised that before I sailed you would tell me something about Uncle James. I know you don't like the subject, but it might be as well I knew something, just in case I should come across him. Of course it is not likely, but one never knows what may happen."

"There is not much to be said—not much, at least, that I care to say," replied the rector. "Five and twenty years ago your uncle and I had a misunderstanding. Poor dear James! he was a warm-hearted fellow, but reckless and self-willed. He would have it that I had wronged him, though I certainly had no intention of doing so. He went away from home, and for a time no one knew where he was. Then there came a letter to say that he had got into the Hudson Bay Company's service. Since then I have heard from him two or three times; but he has never returned to England, and his communications have been brief and un-

satisfying. Poor dear Jim! Should you meet him assure him of my love. Say I desire always to think of him as we were boys together, before the cloud came between us; and say that he was mistaken in thinking I had wronged him."

A week after the above conversation Fraser Fairhope found himself in Liverpool ready to embark. For some reason or another the *Parisian* did not sail, but her place was very fairly supplied by another steamer put on for the occasion. And now the eventful Thursday morning had come, and by eleven o'clock Fraser found himself in the midst of a busy, moving throng of human beings, that swarmed like bees about the decks and up and down the hatchways of the great ocean steamer as she lay by the quay-side in one of the basins of the Alexandra Dock.

All was bustle and confusion, and as he stood aloof and watched the scene, Fraser wondered how order was ever to be produced out of such a chaos, and where all this mixed multitude would be stowed away when the voyage commenced. The poor young fellow felt very desolate and lonely; and he was therefore proportionately cheered when the resident S.P.C.K. chaplain to emigrants, on whom he had called the previous afternoon, "spotted" him amid the crowd, made his way to him, and a few minutes later introduced him to Mr. Sharples, who had just come on board.

"This is Mr. Fairhope, a clergyman's son," commenced the chaplain.

"Oh, we need no introduction, do we?" cried Mr. Sharples, extending his hand. "Your father and I were, literally, in the same boat nearly thirty

years ago, and now I've shipped along with the son."

"It was a great comfort to my father to know that you were going out with us, I can assure you, and I don't know how I can thank you myself for your kind letters," said Fraser, warmly.

"Oh, don't talk about that, or wait at all events till the voyage is over. It is always a pleasure to me to hold out a helping hand. I think you said you were going intermediate ; a very sensible thing to do. I'll be sure to look you up, because I'll want to make a lot of use of you. Good-bye for the present. Great as the crowd appears, we'll all shake down soon enough and get to know each other's whereabouts ;" and the genial gentleman, who was evidently as much at home on shipboard as on land, turned to listen to the chief steward who had a message to convey from the captain.

A few minutes later the confusion and noise became intensified. Fraser turned to see what was up, and found that it was the saloon passengers who, now that the time of sailing was at hand, were pouring on board in a continuous stream. The sight of such a number of well-dressed people, most of them looking prosperous and happy—or at all events putting on a brave show of hope and jollity—was very interesting to our young voyager, whose opportunities of studying his fellow-creatures under varied aspects and conditions had hitherto been very limited. Some faces specially impressed him. There were a couple of girls whom he had watched as they came along the gangway, and who subsequently appeared leaning over the rails of the saloon deck, and looking down with amused

interest on the throng of intermediate passengers below. Two or three of the men also attracted his attention. Fraser was not at all a romantic young fellow. He was not tempted to begin spinning imaginative yarns about these people. He could not tell why they had impressed him, yet he felt sure that he would continue to be interested in them throughout the voyage.

That voyage had now begun. The tumult, having reached its highest point, suddenly lulled, the last bell sounded, the gangway was withdrawn, messages were shouted, handkerchiefs were waved. Then, quietly, cautiously, slowly, the big vessel slipped out into the open basin and glided onward towards the narrow entrance of the dock, through which the troubled waters of the Mersey were now rolling in miniature billows.

It would not be interesting to follow out in detail the daily events of an ordinary transatlantic voyage. The first thing that struck Fraser was the rapidity with which every one began to settle down. The decks, which had been crowded at the time of departure, soon became comparatively clear. Passengers of all classes had gone below to inspect their quarters and to "fix themselves up" in the limited space that was to be specially their own for the next ten days. Not till the second lightship had been passed, and the low-lying lands about the estuary of the Mersey were almost out of sight, did Fraser Fairhope follow the general example. The place allotted to him was in an airy and roomy cabin, which he shared with seven or eight other men. Three or four of these he found arranging their belongings, and they seemed to

be respectable and obliging young fellows. Poor Fraser had not very much to unpack or arrange, but he made the most of the operation, and tried to be busy and interested. Then, when the bell rang, he went bravely to dinner. After that—well, after that he retreated to his bunk, and made no pretence of being otherwise than abjectly miserable till the next morning, when the stopping of the engines brought him, with others who had been in like affliction, on deck. The steamer was lying motionless on the tranquil waters of Lough Foyle, off the pretty little town of Moville.

The four or five hours spent at Moville, while the steamer waited for the mails, constituted a delicious respite to those, and they were many, for whom the introductory ordeal of a night's run from Liverpool through a choppy sea had proved too much. Their spirits revived as they came on deck to sun themselves and to feast their eyes on the green Irish hills which many beheld for the first and only time.

During these hours of waiting, the Rev. Frank Sharples was busily and happily engaged in the duties of the office he had undertaken. This was not his first or second voyage, and therefore he knew well what he was about. He had been all over the ship, and had formed a good general estimate of the character of his temporary parishioners. Chatting to one here and to another there, supplying practical information or speaking a word of comfort, distributing wholesome literature and leaflets, his figure had already become familiar to the emigrants. Just as the tender with the mails on board was coming alongside, Mr. Sharples en-

countered Fraser. He inquired after his health, and then promptly enlisted him as a recruit for the service that he proposed to hold as soon as the vessel was fairly on her course again.

"You'll tell all you can, and bring some fellows along with you, won't you? And I shall look to you to help with the singing. Your father told me you had a good tenor voice." And Fraser, who, now that he was in smooth water, felt as though he would never be ill again, readily consented.

Fraser Fairhope never forgot the solemn gathering that took place in the forepart of the ship that afternoon, and we may believe there were others who did not forget it either. The sea was much calmer now, and the steamer had slipped rapidly along the precipitous Donegal coast, reaching out to where Tory Island lay in the glow of the sunset—the last rock fortress of the old world pushed out into the wild Atlantic.

A congregation of over a hundred had gathered round Mr. Sharples when the service commenced, and the number had more than doubled before the conclusion. As generally happens on board these emigrant ships, a little band of earnest Christian people was quickly forthcoming in response to the chaplain's first invitation. Men and women who had been accustomed to the beautiful services of the Church from childhood, and who, in every quarter of the realm, had sung the same favourite and well-known hymns, were delighted to have the opportunity of raising their united voices in prayer and praise to the common Father, into whose providential keeping they were committing themselves and all their worldly fortunes.

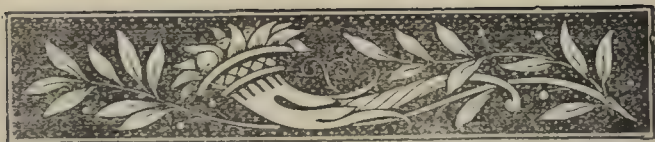
The occasion was a momentous one, and that nature must have been hard indeed that remained untouched by the simple earnestness with which Mr. Sharples impressed the lesson of its significance.

"Just consider our position this night, my friends," he said. "Here are we, over one thousand souls all told, the population of a considerable village, more than the population of many a country parish, drawn together within the narrow limits of this ship. Before the darkness closes round us we shall be out of sight of land. Two thousand miles of ocean will lie before us, and beneath us four miles of dark, still water. Many here behold the sea for the first time—at least you have never been right out on the bosom of the ocean. You are about to begin a new life in a new world, a world of which you have heard, but which you have never seen. Will you not, ere you sleep to-night, commit yourself and all your ways, all your hopes and fears, to Him who measureth the waters in the hollow of His hand? What a splendid opportunity is this that God gives us! Can you ever expect such another? Even at the best it will be nearly a week before we see the land again; it will be more than a week before we set foot on shore at the haven where we would be. You who are going forth to settle in the West will never forget this voyage; it will be a week apart in your life, however long that life may be. You know not what awaits you in the land of your adoption. There will be labour and anxiety and some disappointment—of that you may be sure. There may be worldly success, but there may be also failure. But whatever your

fortune, good or ill, may be, will it not be a blessed thing if you are able to look back on this week and to date from it a new departure in your spiritual course! Think of that to-night, and join with me in praying for God's blessing on the services and meetings that we may be permitted to hold during the days that we shall be together in this ship." A few words of prayer followed, and then it seemed as though every voice in the now largely augmented congregation united to swell the volume of sound as the familiar strains of "Glory to Thee, my God, this night" rose into the still evening air.

Long did Fraser Fairhope continue to pace the deck that night. He rather shrank from going below, and, indeed, the still, solemn beauty of the wide expanse of sea and sky held him enchanted. He waited till the last of the Donegal mountains became merged in the dark clouds that lay banked up on the eastern horizon. Then he lingered on till the light on Tory Island sank into the sea. Then at last, though unwillingly, he turned in, slept soundly, and dreamt that he was a boy once more singing in the choir at Pixley.





CHAPTER VII.

A WEEK IN A LIFE.

ON Sunday Mr. Sharples was fully occupied. There was an early celebration of the Holy Communion at half-past seven, full morning service at half-past ten, an afternoon Bible-reading in the women's quarter, and evening service in the steerage at eight o'clock. The principal service in the saloon was largely attended by persons from all parts of the ship. There was an extemporized choir, in which Fraser Fairhope found himself occupying a prominent position, the accompaniments being played on the piano by one of the young ladies of whom he had taken such special notice at the time of embarkation. After service Fraser ascertained that the pianist was a Miss Fergie, and that a fair, delicate-looking young man who stood by her side was her brother. The other girl, to whom the youth was evidently very attentive, was a Miss Woods.

On several subsequent occasions, Fraser had passing opportunities in which he noted, with quiet amusement, the progress of the intimacy between young Fergie and Miss Woods. He also

noted that while these two were occupied together, Miss Fergie's usual companion was a certain short, handsome man, by whose self-confident and almost insolent manner he had been impressed as he watched the saloon passengers coming on board at Liverpool. From the first Fraser had taken a great dislike to this man, and now he began to feel quite murderous towards him. The fact was that our young emigrant had fallen violently in love with Miss Fergie.

The great event of the week was the concert which came off on Friday night, but for which considerable preparation had been made during the previous days. An entertainment of this sort has become almost part of the routine on board an American liner, the profits—which sometimes run into a very handsome sum—being, for the most part, given to the Liverpool Seaman's Orphanage. The concert is open to saloon and intermediate passengers without admission charge, but a collection is made at the conclusion. A good deal of money is also made by the sale of programmes. It is managed thus. Among the passengers there is sure to be somebody, often there are several such persons, who can design a border, comic or otherwise. The programme is neatly written in, and a number of impressions are taken off by one of the ordinary multiplying machines. The stock is then judiciously distributed among three or four of the most attractive ladies. To the fair saleswomen every one surrenders, and the lot is soon cleared at prices varying from a few pence to as many shillings, according to the popularity of the design and the persuasiveness of the vendor.

The arrangement of the concert is generally regarded, by the ship's officers at least, as part of the chaplain's duties ; so, upon the Tuesday, Mr. Sharples received a message, for which he was quite prepared, "with the captain's compliments, to know if anything was being arranged about a concert?" Now, the parson, not being a musical man himself, always adopted the plan of saddling the responsibility, if not exactly all the trouble of the concert, upon some individual who had shown an aptitude that way. On the present occasion he at once put himself in the hands of Miss Fergie and her brother. The selection was a happy one, for the pair were general favourites—in fact, they, with their friend Miss Woods, were the pets of the saloon. In a few hours a draft programme was ready, rehearsals were being arranged, and the time had come to seek out artists for the embellishment of the programmes.

In this respect, too, Mr. Sharples was fortunate. There was no lack of talent on board. One gentleman produced, from memory, a spirited water-colour picture of a celebrated lady singing, in costume, a celebrated song. This design was not suitable to copying, but the original was knocked down by auction for ten shillings. Two other designs were given in, and from each of these about a hundred copies were taken off. The one was the work of a French artist who happened to be on board. It was a beautifully executed representation of a girl seated in a swing beneath the bough of a tree, cupids and doves being thrown in at the corners as suggestive adjuncts. The alternative design, the amateur work of a commercial

man from Glasgow, admirably "hit off" the appearance and attitudes of the passengers when engaged in the "deck sports" of shovel-board and ring-throwing, wherewith Atlantic voyagers are wont to while away the time. Perhaps this programme, on account of the "local interest," was the more popular of the two ; at any rate, purchasers paid their money and took their choice. It may be mentioned here that the net result of this particular concert was exactly twenty pounds.

It was the concert that finished Fraser, poor fellow ! Mr. Sharples had put him down for a song, and that involved a rehearsal in the course of the morning with Miss Fergie. That young lady having been merely told that "a young fellow out of the intermediate wanted to try over his song," was prepared for an underbred and possibly bumptious person. She was accordingly somewhat on her dignity as she took the piece of music tendered her and, with scarce a glance behind, commenced to play. Her surprise was therefore proportionate when a softly spoken, deferential word or two, in reference to some point in the music, admonished her quick ear that she had a man of education and polite manners to deal with. And then, when "the young fellow out of the intermediate" had poured forth his song with full tone and faultless accentuation, she was alike surprised and charmed. She spun round on the music-stool, and looking Fraser frankly in the face, exclaimed—

"That will go beautifully, I think. Is there anything else you would like to try over in case of an *encore* ?"

"I only brought in the one song, and—and—

there will be plenty of ladies and gentlemen to perform without my taking up the time."

It was a modest speech modestly spoken, but Miss Fergie was not to be put off.

"Oh, you had better have a second song ready. There is a lot of music here. Can't you find something, Jack, that would suit this?" ("young fellow from the intermediate" was the form of expression that would have come most readily from her lips)

"this—I mean Mr. I really don't know your name."

Fraser bent forward and uttered his name in so low a tone that even Miss Fergie failed to catch it.

"Thank you," she said; and then continued, "Have *you* discovered anything you can recommend, Mr. Parker?"

There was something slightly contemptuous in the tone of the last words, and Fraser looked up with curiosity to see who the person addressed as Mr. Parker might be. There stood the man whom his soul abhorred, and whom he was coming to regard as a rival! The handsome face was now dark and distorted with anger, and Fraser, who was the best-natured fellow in the world, and had never entertained a *really* malicious thought about any one, was startled by the glare of gloomy ferocity with which his own glance of innocent inquiry was met. The fact was that Mr. Parker was in a very bad temper. He thought he could sing—but he couldn't. Accordingly, Miss Fergie and her brother had omitted to ask him to take part in the concert, and Mr. Parker had avenged himself by asserting loudly that "these *does* on board ship were a beastly nuisance, and that

nothing would induce him to take part in one of them." At all of which Jack Fergie laughed good-humouredly, but his sister was just a wee bit annoyed. Hence the passing spitefulness of tone which had made Fraser look up with such curiosity into Mr. Parker's face, and hence, in part at least, that gentleman's ferocity.

The concert, when it came off, was a brilliant success. For one thing, the vessel, being now in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, was well under the shelter of the land; the sea was perfectly calm, and nearly everybody on board was quite well. There had been a good deal of fog, and a heavy sea too, off the Banks of Newfoundland; but now all trouble seemed to be at an end, and every one was looking forward to entering the mighty St. Lawrence river on the following morning. So every one was in good spirits, and willing to be pleased.

The programme was excellently carried out, and, as Miss Fergie had anticipated, Fraser Fairhope scored a success. His style pleased the saloon passengers, and the "intermediates" applauded him as being one of themselves. He was *encored*; and when it was all over, the only thing the happy youth saw was the sweet smile which Nellie Fergie bestowed upon him, and the only thing he heard was the half-involuntary exclamation, "You did splendidly!" as she rose from the piano.

Mr. Parker did not grace the concert with his presence; and next morning rumours were whispered round of certain smoke-room orgies with which a few genial spirits had celebrated that last night at sea.

But whatever others might be doing, Fraser slept very peacefully that Friday night. He was not even disturbed by dreams of Nellie Fergie; for though his simple heart beat lustily when he recalled her smile and her words of commendation, he soon became oblivious to the delights and triumphs of the evening, and slept till morning like a healthy, whole-hearted young man.

It was the yelling of the whistle and the whiz of successive rockets that awoke Fraser. In a few minutes he was on deck. The steamer was going half speed, and on the port side lights were twinkling in several directions. Beyond, the land, distant perhaps a couple of miles, was dimly outlined against the twilight sky. This was Ramouski, where the mails are taken off, and where Fraser had been assured the "French fellows" generally kept the steamer waiting for an hour or so before they woke up sufficiently to send out the tender. However it might have been on other occasions, in this instance the authorities were certainly not at fault. In a very few minutes a light that had hitherto rested motionless at some distance outside the pier, began to move, and in ten minutes the outline of the tender, with her huge exposed crank engine, came looming through the morning mists.

All was now excitement. The medical officer and two or three port officials came on board. There was a brief parley with the ship's doctor, other formalities were quickly got through, and then the work of getting the mail-bags transferred to the tender was proceeded with as rapidly as possible. Three or four passengers followed, the tender was cast off, and the great steamer, her

voyage now almost accomplished, proceeded majestically on her course through the strengthening light towards Quebec.

The sail occupied the entire day, and this fact in itself served to impress the voyagers with the magnitude of the St. Lawrence river. For a considerable time, till the light increased and the stream began to narrow, the northern bank was invisible; yet on the southern side the steamer kept on an average quite two miles from shore. Along that shore there stretches for two hundred miles a succession of dwellings, so close together as to constitute what might almost be described as one continuous street. Here, in primitive style, dwell the descendants of the original French settlers, who built their houses thus for the sake of mutual society and defence, and also that all might enjoy the advantage of a good road, an advantage of great value in so severe a climate, and where the ground is covered with snow for so many months in the year. From this secure and settled base, as it were, each man's holding of land extended far into the desolate, uninhabited interior in a narrow strip.

In the course of the afternoon Mr. Sharples held a final service for the emigrants on deck. It was a solemn, happy gathering, and many hearts were touched as, for the last time, the voices that had so often blended together on the wide bosom of the Atlantic, now rose in a *Te Deum* of thanks and praise to the "Eternal Father, strong to save," who had brought them to the haven where they would be. At the conclusion of the service, quite a number, especially of young men, who had been impressed during the voyage by the chaplain's

exhortations and warnings, came forward and took the temperance pledge, binding themselves to abstain from alcoholic drink for at least two years. "After that time you will have had sufficient experience to enable you to judge for yourselves, and I do not think many of you will wish to go back," said Mr. Sharples.

Twilight was hanging over the mighty river once more when the world-famed citadel of Quebec came in sight. The river was now sufficiently narrow for objects on both sides to be easily noted, and everyone was soon on the alert to catch a passing glimpse—for, as the steamer passes round a curve, that is all that can be had—of the celebrated falls of Montmorenci. This fall is ninety feet higher than Niagara, the stream springing, like a broad, flashing white ribbon, from the summit of a cliff right into the river below. For the two or three minutes during which the waterfall was visible, all eyes were fixed on it; then the observant throng turned to feast their gaze upon the city of Quebec. Is there any more striking sight anywhere to be seen than this venerable seaport of the New World, as it lies two hundred miles from the outer ocean, jutting out at the foot of its steep cliffs into the monarch river of the northern hemisphere? The general arrangement of the place recalls Dover, the houses crowded down to the water's edge, while here and there an ambitious building or a break-neck street climbs up towards the fortified heights above; but the place itself is thoroughly French, and wandering through its narrow streets you might readily imagine yourself in Boulogne, or some similarly situated town.

At Quebec the steerage and intermediate passengers were to disembark, and trains were in waiting on the Grand Trunk and Canadian Pacific lines, to convey them to their varied and more or less distant places of destination. To the saloon passengers was offered the option, which the great majority accepted, of sleeping on board and proceeding in the steamer to Montreal, as soon as daylight rendered the navigation of the upper St. Lawrence safe.

As the steamer came slowly alongside the wharf, Mr. Sharples exchanged friendly greetings with the local S.P.C.K. chaplain, who was waiting to render whatever services he could to the emigrants. Many took it as a good omen, and it was certainly most cheering to find a kindly and experienced friend thus close at hand, and one who was able as well as willing to help. For it turned out that the clergyman had several commissions to execute—a coachman was wanting, and a couple of gardeners, and three or four domestic servants. Thus several fortunate emigrants, who carried with them good testimonials and letters of recommendation, found themselves already provided for as they stepped on shore.

Although all the arrangements for landing passengers and baggage were excellent, the process occupied a considerable time. It was a beautiful evening, and for several hours the wharf and adjoining railway depôt was a scene of bustle and good-humoured excitement. The officials, including the agents of the Grand Trunk and Canadian Pacific Railway, were intelligent, sympathetic, and obliging. At the Canadian Pacific Railway station

a commodious waiting-room is provided for the newly arrived immigrants, and there is an excellent refreshment-counter at which provisions of all sorts can be cheaply purchased. Here a crowd of people was soon assembled, laying in stores of bread, cheese, biscuits, potted meats, butter, and so forth, for consumption "aboard the cars." What with exchanging steamer-tickets for the necessary railway passes, clearing the piles of baggage through the customs, etc., there was plenty to be done. But plenty of time was allowed in which to do it, and there seemed no likelihood of the special trains being freighted and sent off west much before midnight.

When the time came for Fraser Fairhope to go ashore he felt quite cast down and desolate. True, he had made several acquaintances who would be his fellow-travellers on the cars; but in leaving the ship he felt as though he were leaving home again. He was obliged to say good-bye to Mr. Sharples, who was going on to Montreal by water; and there was another yet stronger emotion at work which he hardly liked to acknowledge the existence of. Thus, with a heavy heart, and carrying with him all his worldly goods, our young adventurer walked down the gangway, rested his belongings on the wharf, and turned to have a last look at the steamer, and especially at the saloon deck.

An incident now occurred, which, though trifling at the time, was destined to be brought back to memory by subsequent events. Just as Fraser turned to look at the steamer he heard a shout, and saw something fluttering down from the saloon

deck and falling into the narrow space of oily water shut in between the wooden wharf and the perpendicular iron side of the steamer. One glance up, and Fraser beheld Nellie Fergie and her friend Miss Woods eagerly leaning over the rail ; a glance down, and he saw that it was a gentleman's overcoat that was floating, lining upwards, on the water. "It must be brother Jack's, and I verily believe *she* is looking appealingly to me for help." So said the young fellow to himself, and without more ado he dropped over the edge of the wharf and descended by means of a chain that hung down into the water. Instantly a crowd gathered round, and words of warning and direction were freely shouted down into the narrow chasm. As for Fraser, while keeping his eyes fixed on the coat, his only distinct thought was that Nellie Fergie was sure to be gazing down on his broad back. Once he slipped and almost fell into the water, and he wondered if that had made her heart beat quicker.

But now, just as he jammed his back against the side of the steamer, and, holding on for dear life with one hand, proceeded to lift the coat from the water with the other, Fraser uttered a cry of surprise. It might have been his own coat, indeed he would have been ready to swear that it was his own had he not known that the garment in question was safely strapped to his portmanteau which lay on the wharf above him. Well, this was a duplicate ; it bore on the tag the name of the same maker at Canterbury, and a number was affixed, 1108, which Fraser took mental note of as he secured his prize and scrambled up with it into the daylight again.

"Thank you very much, my good man," said a voice close by, and at the same time Fraser was conscious that a coin was being held out for his acceptance. He looked up and found himself face to face, not with Jack Fergie but with Mr. Parker. His first inclination was to dispute Parker's right to the coat, or, at least, to demand how he had come by it, but he controlled himself and said bluntly—

"I don't need your money, sir ; and besides, I—I didn't know the coat was yours."

"Well, I didn't flatter myself it was an act of personal kindness ; but you knew the coat belonged to some fellow, and as I happen to be that fellow, I thank you all the same."

The pair looked at each other for a moment, the one with mortification and anger, the other with quiet scorn. Then Fraser lifted his traps and strode off towards the dépôt. Mr. Parker slipped his half-crown into his pocket, lit a cigar, and returned to the steamer.

"That wonderful tenor of yours is rather a boorish sort of person," he said sneeringly, as he strolled up to Nellie and her friend.

"Do you mean Mr. Fairhope?" replied the girl, somewhat stiffly.

"Fairhope! Did you say his name is Fairhope?"

"Yes, I suppose that is his name ; at least, it was down so on the concert programme. You seem surprised."

"Not surprised exactly, but struck by the uncommon name ; in fact, I think I have only heard it once before," explained Mr. Parker, who had quickly recovered himself.

"Perhaps it is not his real name at all, but only an assumed one," suggested Miss Woods, innocently.

"That is a queer idea. Why should a man assume a name, I wonder?" Then Mr. Parker turned away muttering to himself.

"Hang the fellow's impudence! I thought there was something in the expression of his spoony face that reminded me of somebody, and of somebody I can't help thinking about either, worse luck."





CHAPTER VIII.

COMPLICATIONS AT PIXLEY.

“**O**H dear, dear, what a dreadful thing this is that has happened!” cried Mr. Fairhope, as he burst into the drawing-room where Hilda was sitting one afternoon, about a month after Fraser’s departure.

“What, father dear? Nothing about Fraser, is it?” And the girl sprang to her feet and came hurriedly forward.

Only that morning they had debated the question as to whether they might not have reasonably expected a letter before now, and Cuthbert, who professed to know all about it, had announced that the following post would bring the longed-for news. Naturally the sister’s first thought was for the absent brother.

“No, no, darling,” replied the rector, “we may trust that for the boy no news is good news so far. But there has been an awful accident. Poor Mrs. Buckthorpe has been killed!”

“Killed! How? Where?” gasped Hilda.

“You know one of the carriage horses is ill, so Cleaver took Mrs. Buckthorpe in the phaeton to go

to the station, driving that brute Vindictive, who, the squire would have it, was quite trustworthy in harness. Well, it happened as might have been expected—the horse bolted, upset the carriage, and then trotted back to Pixley Court with the broken shafts dragging behind him. That spread the alarm. They went out and found both the coachman and Mrs. Buckthorpe lying insensible. The man was not much hurt, but she, poor thing, died before they could get her to the house. I met the people carrying her: it has quite upset me. I never knew anything so dreadful and so sudden—and Mr. Buckthorpe away from home, too.” And the man, completely overcome, sank into a chair and covered his face with his hands.

“I think, father, we ought to go over to Pixley Court,” said Hilda, quietly. “It does not seem right to leave everything to the servants at such a time: and Mr. Buckthorpe ought to be sent for at once.”

“No doubt Palmer, the butler, will have seen to that,” replied Mr. Fairhope. “But I think you are right. Let us go along and see if we can be any help.”

So father and daughter went together to “the great house” which had, at a stroke, been converted into a house of mourning. They waited till the doctor arrived and formally confirmed the verdict that touch and sight had already pronounced. Then the three talked together till the groom, who had been promptly despatched by the butler to the nearest telegraph office, brought in the reply message which announced that Mr. Buckthorpe would be home that night.

"The poor old lady's departure will make a difference here," said the doctor to Mr. Fairhope, as they walked across the stable-yard together. "I shouldn't be surprised if the governor marries again before she has had time to settle comfortably in her grave."

"What a shocking idea! You ought not to let yourself talk in such a way, doctor," remonstrated Mr. Fairhope.

"Well, we shall see," was the reply. "He wouldn't mind doing violence to his feelings or to the proprieties to keep Master Dick out of the estate. And you see, rector," he added, in a lower tone, "he knows that his life is not a good one—I have told him so. Good night."

Events proved that the doctor knew his man. Squire Buckthorpe buried his wife with all due solemnity and honour. He attended church twice on the following Sunday, and then he retired to London for six weeks—doubtless to mourn there in the seclusion of his club. At the end of that time he was back at Pixley, clad in new clothes, and generally furbished up so as to look half a dozen years younger than before his bereavement. He called at the rectory two or three times with an orchid in his button-hole; eagerly acceded to Hilda's personal request as to the repairs and drainage of a certain labourer's cottage, which had been a long-standing scandal to the parish; became assiduous in his attendance at church; and, under pretext of feeling lonely, induced the rector and Hilda to dine with him on several occasions.

What all this was leading up to the neighbour-

hood was not slow to conclude; Mr. and Miss Fairhope alone were ignorant of what had come to be common talk. It was by the doctor that the eyes of the former were somewhat rudely but very effectively opened.

One bright morning the two gentlemen met in a narrow lane. As the rector drew himself close to the bank to let the doctor's dog-cart pass, some words of friendly greeting were exchanged.

"Well, when is the wedding to be? Take my advice, and don't put off too long! Hang the proprieties, say I. You remember what I told you that night in the yard?"

"I don't understand you. To what wedding do you refer?" replied Mr. Fairhope, innocently. Yet even as he spoke a perception of the doctor's meaning flashed upon him, and he looked up at his questioner with an angry light in his eyes.

"Nonsense, rector; you understand me right enough. But there, I meant no offence, and wouldn't have spoken had I not heard that everything was settled."

"I don't understand you, and would be glad of your explanation," said Mr. Fairhope.

"Well, if you don't, you ought to, that's all I can say, my good sir. You had better ask some of your parishioners what they are all talking about every day, and all day long." And, covering his retreat with this retort, the doctor gave the rein to his horse and drove on.

Mr. Fairhope saw it all now, and he did not know whether to be angry or pleased. One thing he was resolved on, namely, that he must have it out with the squire without a day's delay. If the

man meant anything, he should say so ; if he did not, immediate steps must be taken to free Hilda's name from an intolerable scandal. So, knowing that his only chance was to strike while the iron was hot, the rector bent his steps forthwith to Pixley Court.

The squire received his visitor affably, and was perfectly frank—brutally frank, it might be said by some—in his explanations. Yes, he wished to marry Hilda, and he had only delayed his formal proposal out of deference to public opinion. The sooner the matter was now concluded the better pleased he would be. He was bound to marry and to have a son, so as to keep his nephew out of the estate. There was no time to lose, for he was not a young man and did not enjoy the best of health. "But," he added coolly, "my widow will have a handsome jointure, and there will be some fine pickings out of the estate during the boy's minority."

Mr. Buckthorpe next proceeded to explain why, a wife being necessary, his choice had fallen on the rector's daughter. "You see, my dear sir, she is on the spot, she is pretty, and you have brought her up simply. I am too old and in too great a hurry to go fortune-hunting. I have known your Hilda since she was a baby, and, my word ! at times I feel quite fond of her. I say to myself I might go farther and fare very much worse. Now, Mr. Fairhope, I wish you to look at this matter from a business point of view. I offer your daughter a good position and a good income, and if there are any other points about which you are anxious, I will meet you as far as I possibly can. I rely on

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your good offices. Will you intercede for me, or had I better go and plead my own cause in person?"

"I think," replied the rector, "it might be as well if I broke—I mean, if I opened the matter to my daughter in the first instance. Of course, Mr. Buckthorpe, I recognize the advantages of the position and realize the honour you have done us, but, you see, objections might be taken; young ladies have their own ways of looking at things, and—and—nothing would induce me to attempt to put any constraint on my daughter. She shall be free, perfectly free, to decide for herself."

"Of course, of course; I understand all about these necessary preliminaries, and, as I have said, you will not find me unreasonable. Once the matter is definitely settled I am willing to dance on the young lady's pleasure for a reasonable time. Indeed, I might be induced to postpone the marriage till after the first anniversary of my lamentable bereavement. Still, as you parsons are always telling us, life is uncertain, and I would be reluctant to incur such a long delay."

Feeling himself getting angry at the cool way in which his daughter was being bartered, Mr. Fairhope brought the interview to a close as soon as possible, and walked slowly home to "break the news" to Hilda.

The girl listened in silence, and for a time in incredulity. Amusement, anger, scorn, these emotions passed through her breast, but she was conscious of no other. Never for a moment did she entertain the idea of accepting Mr. Buckthorpe's proposal—no, not even when her father

put the advantages before her, as he felt bound to do.

"Looked at from a worldly point of view the position is a splendid one—other girls would 'jump at it,' as the saying is. And the chance is such a one as seldom comes twice in a lifetime."

"But, father, you do not wish me to look at it from a worldly point of view, do you?"

Mr. Fairhope paused a moment, and then replied gravely—

"No, my darling, I would not wish you to look at it from a worldly point of view. But you must be the mistress of your own destinies, and I do not wish to influence you either way. I can only pray that God will guide you to a right decision. Will you take two or three days to consider Mr. Buckthorpe's offer?"

"There is no need to do that, father dear. You may tell him to-morrow that I decline the honour with—I should like to say 'scorn,' but I suppose you had better be civil and say 'thanks.' I shall not give the matter another thought."

Next morning Mr. Fairhope conveyed his daughter's decision to Pixley Court. But the squire absolutely refused to accept it. He concluded that there must be some mistake, and that the parson had made a muddle of it in his office of go-between. He would see the young miss himself, he would explain matters to her, he would even try to make love to her.

Hilda shrank from the interview, but it was practically forced upon her, and she was obliged to listen to all that Mr. Buckthorpe had to say. At first she was profuse in her expressions of grati-

tude; and indeed, in her girlish innocence, she had no difficulty in believing that a very great honour had been conferred upon her. But as the squire continued to press his suit, treating her reiterated refusal with open contempt and incredulity, she grew angry and had no wish but to bring the interview to a close as quickly as possible.

"You don't seem to realize the position I am in," said Mr. Buckthorpe in a final appeal; "I must get married again and that soon. Well, I have no time or inclination to go courting round the county, and why should I, when I have a good and beautiful girl at my very door—one of the sweetest girls I have ever set eyes on?"

"And just to oblige you I am to marry a man more than double my age—a man I don't love, don't care for, can't even respect! The very proposal is an insult," cried Hilda, whose self-control was beginning to give way.

The squire of Pixley drew himself up. "I can understand this girls' talk about love and all that, but may I ask, miss, why you should say that you do not respect me?"

"I ought not to have said that, Mr. Buckthorpe; pray forgive me," said Hilda. "I merely meant that I could not respect you if you went on urging me in this way. Why should you be in such a hurry to marry again? There is your nephew. I believe he has offended you; but why should you not forgive him, have him to live with you, help him to do right, and fit him to be your heir, as I understand he will be in due time?"

All this the girl poured forth out of the fulness of a kind, womanly heart. Her own past relations

with Dick never occurred to her while speaking, nor did she ask herself how she would like to have him back at Pixley, "learning to do right" under the eye of his uncle. Yes, she had spoken without consideration, but she was not prepared for the result. Mr. Buckthorpe, who had been endeavouring to take her hand, started back as though he received a blow. With a round oath, such as the girl had never heard before, he swore that Dick should never inherit an acre of his land or a penny of his money.

"Why, that is what I want to be married for, you stupid ninny. And so you wish me to have Dick to live at Pixley?—that would just suit your game, my pretty miss! You'd get the young man instead of the old one, and be mistress of Pixley Court in the end. I've heard something of this before—gamekeeper's gossip and such-like talk—but, faith, I gave no heed to it. But now you are soft enough to show your hand—a very pretty little hand, truly! You could have played a nice game, if only you weren't a fool yourself and had a fool to deal with. My word, miss, your papa ought to be told about this!"

Beside himself with rage, and scarce knowing what he said, Mr. Buckthorpe was now striding up and down the room, halting at each turn in front of Hilda to enforce his bitter words with sneering face and gesture.

The poor girl was horrified. She felt that she had brought this shame, in a measure, on herself, and she was keenly alive to the stupidity of what she had just said. But nothing could justify the outrageous treatment she was receiving. Her spirit

rose in angry revolt under the bitter sneers and offensive looks of the furious man in front of her. She stepped back and rang the bell, saying, with forced composure—

“There is no use prolonging a painful scene like this. You have quite forgotten yourself, Mr. Buckthorpe, and had better leave.”

This was courageously said, but as Hilda pulled the bell, she remembered that of the two servants one was having a day out, and the other was probably engaged at that moment in an out-building, where the bell would be quite inaudible. Fortunately, however, her visitor was not aware of these domestic details, and not wishing to have any witness of his discomfiture and rage, he took up his hat and prepared to leave.

“You are right, Miss Fairhope ; there *is* no use prolonging a scene of this sort. But, rest assured, you have this day thrown away the only chance you will ever have of being mistress of Pixley Court.” So saying, Mr. Buckthorpe made an elaborate bow and left the room.

After that, poor Miss Fairhope had a bad time of it. Some said she had wickedly thrown away the chance that Providence had presented to her ; others dwelt on the heartless cruelty with which she had treated the squire, whose only fault was that he had been too fond of her. There were just a few who got hold of the story by the other end, maintaining that the artful girl had thrown away no offer. She would have jumped at the squire, but he wouldn't have her, because he had found out unsatisfactory things about her—things which she couldn't or wouldn't deny.

Thus the gossip went round in different versions ; but when it was announced, two months later, that the squire had married the daughter of his London housekeeper and taken her abroad, every voice agreed in denouncing poor Hilda Fairhope as the person to blame. "She might have kept the poor old gentleman right, and made her own fortune at the same time." That was the general summary of the situation. Somehow or other she had made a mistake—and that, we know, is worse than a crime.





CHAPTER IX.

PREPARING TO "FLIT."

DURING that winter the iron entered deeply into Hilda Fairhope's soul. It was a period of unrest, mortification, and anxiety. A postcard, written at Montreal, had come from Fraser, but the detailed letter therein promised had not yet appeared. Week followed week, and every one became anxious except Cuthbert. That young gentleman professed to be quite at his ease. He said that this was often the way with fellows who went abroad to seek their fortunes. They waited on till they were able to tell a story of brilliant success. He had read things of the sort in a number of his favourite books. The plan was not quite one that commended itself to him, yet he could sympathize with a chap who did not like to bother his relations by telling them when he was down in his luck. Each day he would hope to have something cheerful to report, and so the time would slip by without his exactly knowing it. This was the most consolatory theory that ingenuity could suggest, and even it was based

on the supposition that Fraser had failed to make his way to even a moderate success. Mr. Fairhope grew more and more fidgety daily, and reproached himself for having let Fraser go out alone.

Yet, notwithstanding the disappointment and anxiety caused by Fraser's silence, the idea of a family emigration as a cure for existing and impending evils was by no means given up. Donald never ceased to reproach himself for having refused to accompany his darling brother, and Bert rebelled with the like persistence against having been compelled to stay at home.

As for Hilda, she now detested Pixley, and would willingly have turned her back on the place and all its associations for ever. She knew that people were saying nasty things about her, and, for a time, she lived in perpetual dread of the squire's return. After the wedding, indeed, that source of discomfort was removed, for it was soon rumoured about that Mr. Buckthorpe was likely to remain abroad with his new wife for several years; and the reductions that were being made in the establishment at Pixley Court seemed to add likelihood to the report. But none the less was Hilda Fairhope miserable. Too much, perhaps, she had rejoiced in the sunshine of her popularity, and now, fancying that every one had turned against her, she was unduly cast down.

The rector's health, too, continued to be a source of grave anxiety, as it was also of continuous expense. The throat affection, though occasionally mitigated, did not seem to admit of a permanent cure. Finally, the doctors agreed that the only chance lay in giving up all efforts at public speak-

ing for at least two years. This, coupled with complete change of scene, freedom from worry, and judicious treatment, might bring about a cure, and might fail to do so. When this sentence was pronounced, Mr. Fairhope found himself face to face with these alternatives—either to obtain leave of absence for two years, putting a *locum tenens* into the living for that time, or to resign immediately, realize all his effects, and start with his family for Canada. To remain at Pixley much longer would be to court a complete break-down of his enfeebled health, and a collapse of his embarrassed affairs.

The issues of the above-stated alternative long trembled in the balance, and week after week the subject was discussed, when Donald was at home, round the family table. At last two events combined to bring about a decision in favour of an early family move across the Atlantic. The first was the partial collapse of the bank in which Donald had hitherto been employed. The firm did not exactly fail, but it was found necessary to close several of the branches. So Donald was politely informed that his services would no longer be required after a certain date, and a ten-pound note was handed to him, in addition to his stipulated salary, as an acknowledgment of the esteem in which he had been held. Could the firm find nothing for him at the head office, or at some other branch? No, the partners could hold out no hope of anything in that way. The truth was, though nobody had the heart to say it, that Donald, though painstaking, trustworthy, and most obliging, did not make a very brilliant clerk. Therefore

the heads of the firm, though wishing him well, were not likely to trouble themselves much in order to retain his services. So poor Donald came home, the victim, as he believed, of some mysterious ill-luck that had attended him and his favourite brother in all their efforts to establish themselves in life.

The other event that seemed to beckon, as it were, across the Atlantic, was the arrival of a letter from Mr. Fairhope's long-expatriated brother James, to whom a passing reference has been already made. This document, which produced quite an excitement in the rectory circle, ran as follows :—

“MY DEAR GEORGE,

“You'll be surprised to hear from me at this time of day, but not more surprised, perhaps, than I am to find myself writing. I guess I must be failing a bit, for latterly I have got into a way of thinking a great deal about the old times, when you and I were boys together. The other day I was reading over your last letter which came to hand, it may be two years ago. There seems to be something in it that I don't quite follow, though at the time, being busy, I took but little heed. You speak in your old poetical fashion about clouds and shadows and a ‘common grief’ that ought to make us forbearing, and so forth. I ask myself now what does it mean? Is it possible *she* is dead. Is it possible you wrote me a former letter that I never got? Send me a line, old chap, and clear the matter up. Before that letter I am talking about--and a precious stiff affair it is—I

had had no word from you for, I should say, seven years. I don't keep a diary, but I mostly measure time by the inroads of your so-called civilization—and I know it was before the Canadian Pacific Railway was opened that I found your letter waiting for me at Athabasca landing. You *all* seemed to be well and happy then.

"This country is not what it used to be. It's hard now to put a year and a half between yourself and the big, noisy, outer world. They'll have the cars running to Edmonton soon, and before long I expect to see the cheap tripper on the Great Slave lake. Hunting is going to pot, and the Indian is going to—well, as you are a parson, let me say he is going to beg meal at the mission station. I've made my modest pile, and some old pals advise me to chuck things up here and to go home. But no, England is too small for me. I've got accustomed to this country of 'magnificent distances,' and I'd be like a caged coon among you all—you wouldn't know what to do with me. Why don't you send your young chaps out here? The boys of whom you have told me—*her* boys—must be almost men now. This is the country for *men*, for chaps with grit in them. Send me out one or two, and I'll put them into the run of the place and do them a good turn, if I can. You needn't be afraid of their morals, George! I'm not exactly the same sort of man I was when you used to turn up the whites of your reverend eyes at me and used to sigh over my delinquencies. A fellow doesn't live alone in such a part of the world as this without having time to think over things a bit. But there, I won't trouble

you with my thoughts. This letter is too long already, and you'll understand—an 'elegant scholar' you always were—that your brother Jim's hand is more used to the rifle, the axe, and the paddle than to the pen. Good-bye, old man. Let us cry quits and mutual forgiveness, if so be we are never to meet again on this earth. Trust as many of the lads to me as you like, and I'll act fair by them. Direct to me at Calgary or Edmonton, or, if you like, to both places. I'm sure to strike one of them in the early summer.

"Your 'long-lost' brother,
"JIM."

George Fairhope's eyes were full of tears long before he got to the end of this characteristic epistle.

"Ah, poor Jim—how I have been wronging you all these years!" he exclaimed. Then, turning to Hilda, to whom he had been reading the letter aloud, he continued.

"You see, dear, I have fancied all these years that he had just taken no notice of the letter in which I told of your mother's death. That thought made me feel very bitter, so that when I wrote again it was from a sense of duty, and stiffly, as the poor fellow says. But now it is evident he never got my first letter at all. I might have thought of that, instead of judging my brother so harshly."

"Well, it's a comfort that you will be able to explain matters and set everything right when you meet," exclaimed Cuthbert, who day by day was becoming more firmly established in his self-

selected office of consoler and councillor-general to his family.

"When we meet, Bert! What do you mean?" said Mr. Fairhope, in a dreamy, dubious tone that smote painfully on Hilda's ear.

"I mean when we all go to Canada in the spring, of course. I thought it was practically decided, even before this avuncular invitation arrived. Now surely there will be no hesitation. I call Uncle James a brick. He'll be a regular old trapper, I bet, and will have no end of stories to tell about the fur-traders, and the Indians, and all that. It will be jolly, won't it? He'll be safe to get me a berth with the Hudson Bay people, and then I'll ask to be sent to the very furthest off station—to some place where they only get news of the outer world once in a couple of years."

Mr. Fairhope sighed as he listened, or half listened, to the lad's enthusiastic outburst.

"It is a long, cold journey, and Jim speaks as though we were not destined to meet again in this world."

Then Hilda slipped her arm round his neck.

"That was only because this uncle of ours thinks England too small a place for his mightiness to come to. He'll be delighted, of course, to hear that we are all going out. You won't find the journey long or cold in summer-time, father, and perhaps he will come to Montreal or Quebec to meet us."

"Well, well, we'll talk about it in the morning, and perhaps we may be guided to a final decision. But I think I will go to bed now; this letter from my poor brother has upset me more than you

young people can understand." So saying, the clergyman rose and left the room.

As for the "young people," they sat on, as had become their wont, into the small hours of the night, discussing the future and all its possibilities. As usual, Bert laid down the law, Donald acquiesced, and Hilda alone ventured to have views and opinions of her own.

Thus the matter was decided. The rector gave notice to Mr. Buckthorpe, as patron, of his intention to resign ; and the bishop, having been made cognizant of all the circumstances, approved the plan. Hilda felt as though a great weight had been lifted from her shoulders, and Donald, having now nothing to do, eagerly seconded Cuthbert's preparations and caught the contagion of his enthusiasm.

As soon as the momentous step contemplated by the rector and his family became known, quite an excitement was roused in the parish. An emigration mania spread like wildfire ; and it seemed, to hear folk talk, as though Pixley and the neighbourhood were in a fair way to be left desolate and without inhabitants. After a time, it is true, the people sobered down, but even when the weak-kneed, the irresolute, and the facing-both-ways had been eliminated, there remained a little company of some five and twenty, who, having counted the cost, remained of set purpose to go forth in search of new homes under the leadership of their pastor. There were two or three labourers with large families, half a dozen young unmarried men, a small farmer named Erdis, who, with some little money and a well-grown family of sons and

daughters, seemed just the stuff out of which a successful settler might be made. Among the most active and promising of the young men was George Page, a ploughman, to whom, rumour had it, Mrs. Marsh's daughter had been engaged at the time of her mysterious disappearance.

To organize his little party and to furnish them with all necessary information about the regions in which they proposed to make their future homes, now became a pleasant task for Mr. Fairhope. He corresponded with the Church Emigration Society, and with the S.P.C.K. emigration chaplain in Liverpool. From every quarter he received valuable help and direction, and, indeed, he was quite surprised to find how much had been done to smooth the emigrant's path, and to provide for his physical, moral, and spiritual welfare.

Finally, Mr. Sharples himself came down to Pixley and delivered an illustrated lecture on, "The Canadian North-west as a Home for the English Agriculturalist." He gave a vivid and honest description of the hardships, risks, and trials which the would-be settler must be prepared to face. He had words of practical counsel for "all sorts and conditions of men,"—for him who had a little money and for him who had none, for the married and for the single, for the farm labourer and the rural mechanic, for the ploughman and for him who was conversant rather with stock. There was an opening for everybody, and a fair chance for all. With God's help, there were measureless opportunities for the healthy, the persevering, the sober. The only man that nobody wanted out there was the lazy, loafing, drinking,

bragging fellow. But, then, there was nobody, at home or abroad, who wanted to have anything to say to *him*!

Mr. Sharples stayed the night after his lecture at the rectory, and was enabled to impart not only good advice, but great and abiding comfort to his brother in the ministry. He gave a very good account of Fraser, and expressed his conviction that no real harm had come to the lad. He was surprised and disappointed to hear that no letters had been received, but was not unwilling to accept Cuthbert's favourite explanation. Any mail, he said, might now bring with it a narrative of difficulties overcome and of success achieved.





CHAPTER X.

ENSNARED.

AND what, in the mean while, had become of Fraser? His story, though sad, is sufficiently common—the story of pride meeting with the proverbial fall, of ignorant self-confidence quickly worsted in the conflict with the cunning craftiness of men who lie in wait to deceive. With honourable aspirations in his heart and words of simple humility on his lips, Fraser Fairhope was still trusting in *self*. Well brought up, and of a naturally refined and placid disposition, he had always despised the type of young man who falls an open-mouthed and easy victim to every coarse and carnal temptation that assails him on his entrance into the arena of life's conflict. He prided himself on being a "gentleman," as though there were something in that magic title by which its proud bearer would be rendered invulnerable to every assault of evil. In his ignorance of the world, the young fellow imagined that sin was necessarily "caddish," nor had it yet dawned on him that his virtue and steadiness were of a some-

what negative character. But, as a fact, the very qualities that had hitherto "kept him straight" were just those that had hindered him from achieving the smallest measure of worldly success. There was a want of sustained driving-power within; he was too languid and passionless either greatly to sin or greatly to succeed. Fraser Fairhope had something to unlearn and much to learn, and soon did he find himself in a school sufficiently rough and stern.

The rail journey, extending over three or four days from Quebec to Winnipeg, soon grew wearisome and monotonous. In a "colonist sleeper" one has to take one's chance. The company is mixed, and a disagreeable neighbour cannot be "given a wide berth" as readily as on shipboard. There are no "compartments," and there can be no privacy. A passage runs from end to end of the long car, along which, as the train thunders and jolts on its way, passengers saunter and stagger, getting in the way of one another and of the conductors. At either side of the passage short seats are fixed, comfortable enough for one, but somewhat cramped for two. Above the seats, a shelf, with a sloped-up edge, lets down from the roof of the car. On this the colonist sleeps at night, on this he sprawls during the day, and on this he piles up his miscellaneous goods and chattels—his bundles, his babies, and his provisions.

Fraser was not fortunate in the immediate neighbours with whom fortune threw him in contact on the cars. There was a young clerk from Liverpool, a conceited but soft-hearted creature, absolutely destitute of experience, but none the

less affecting an air of knowing superiority to his rural and south-country acquaintance. Then there were two strapping young fellows from the Midlands, farmers' sons, and likely enough to do well, if only they had not had so much loose cash in their pockets. These and two or three others revolved in an admiring circle round an astute American, who, professing "to know the ropes," was lavish of his information and advice. Fraser was not exactly one of this set, but he hovered round, and, as time slipped by, became more or less involved in their conversation and amusements.

There was not much drinking on the cars, for fortunately the opportunities of obtaining liquor on the Canadian Pacific Railway are few and far between. True, the American gentleman had provided himself with a good stout bottle before leaving Montreal, but for a time he neither made much application to it himself nor was he lavish in his hospitality to his friends. But there was a good deal of card-playing, which, beginning in the form of light amusement, steadily developed into systematic gambling. For a time Fraser had held aloof, for, in fact, he did not know one card from another. Then he had consented to take a few lessons from the obliging American—"just that he might not look like a fool." Then he had played with the others "for love," and had been complimented on his sharpness. Then—it was just when the train, emerging from the woods, opened up the north shore of Lake Superior by Thunder Bay—he ventured his first "quater,"—just to give an interest to the game. Then—then that which was to prove Fraser Fair-

hope's besetting sin began to twine insidiously, remorselessly round conscience, heart, and will, while the train wound its way in and out among rocks and lakes, ever drawing nearer to the mighty inland sea, till it ran boldly forth on its precipitous shore. But to the magnificence of the scene the gamblers gave small heed.

A considerable stay was made at Port Arthur. A run of a thousand miles from Montreal, one-third of the great trans-continental journey, had now been completed. Passengers who had come up the lakes by steamer here joined the train. The others got out, had a look round the rising town, stretched their limbs, and put their watches back an hour to suit the western movement of the train.

"Come, boys, I'll stand a dinner for the lot," cried the American, as he scrambled down from the cars at the head of his faithful following; "and we'll be proud if you will join us, sir," he added to Fraser, who seemed to be hesitating.

"You are very kind, sir," was the reply, "but seeing I have been winning your money, I think I ought to pay the piper."

"Not to-day—not to-day. You shall have your turn at Winnipeg, if your luck holds out so long. The landlord here is my particular friend, and I always patronize him."

So they hurried, without further controversy, into the little hotel that stands close to the depôt, and a capital dinner the travellers got, promptly served, in a clean room, and at a very moderate cost. Then they returned to the platform. There was no hurry. Why should there be, when there were but two events in the twenty-four hours—the one

being the passing through of the west-bound train, and the other the passing through of its east-bound fellow? People, mostly of the male sex, lounged up and down the platform, and then swarmed about the ends of the cars as the conductor, without whistle or peal of bell, casually, as it were, droned out a monotonous "All aboard! all aboard!"

After leaving Port Arthur, the Canadian Pacific Railway track strikes due west through a rough, rock-encumbered, wooded country towards Rat Portage and the beautiful Lake of the Woods. Unfortunately this picturesque region is passed—going either way—at night, and when day dawns the passenger in the west-bound train finds himself already on the broad surface of the open prairie, many miles of which has to be traversed before Winnipeg starts up on his astonished gaze in the afternoon.

The card-playing, interrupted at Port Arthur, had been resumed, and, as evening closed in, the American became more and more generous with his big bottle. For a long time Fraser took nothing. Then they said it wasn't fair, and that he was keeping himself cool in order to win their money. After that, it was impossible to continue to play and not to drink. But drink or no drink, the luck was with the beginner, and Fraser continued to win. He had proposed to enter Winnipeg, as we know, with about two pounds in his pocket; but now he found himself the possessor of ten times that sum, having in the course of the day won nearly a hundred dollars from his companions.

"It's a case of the heathen Chinee and the game

that he didn't understand," sneered the Liverpool clerk, as he changed his last three-dollar note.

"Do you mean to insinuate that I have cheated, you young pup?" demanded Fraser, fiercely.

"Hush, hush, gentlemen! He means to insinuate nothing but that you are a darned lucky fellow. The play has been all on the square—and I say that, though I have been the heaviest loser among you," interposed the American.

This statement rather staggered the two young farmers, who exchanged surprised and sympathetic glances.

"What, then, does the fellow mean by talking about the game that I didn't understand?" persisted Fraser.

"It's a way he has of dropping into poetry to relieve his feelings. For my part, I've no remark to make except that you have displayed most creditable intelligence in assimilating the few lessons that I had the honour to give you this morning."

The conversation was arrested at this point by the sudden stoppage of the train. What was the matter? There was no station—no water-tank. Rumour ran through the cars that an accident had happened to the engine. Some said they would be there all night, others explained that they had been run into a siding to leave the main track clear for an east-bound train.

"Well, let us tumble out, get a mouthful of fresh air, and sum up the situation from the external point of view." So saying the American led the way and descended from the car.

It was now quite dark, and in the confusion

it was not easy to get any information. The American said he would go ahead and inquire what was up; meantime the rest of the party stood in a group, while the Liverpool man, who was decidedly unsteady in gait and tongue, commenced to apologize to Fraser.

Suddenly the cry was raised, "All aboard! all aboard!" And then, without further warning, the train began to move slowly forward. Each man scrambled on to the nearest footboard, for in an American train—seeing you can walk through its entire length—it makes no matter, at a push, where you get on, provided you *do* get on somewhere.

Fraser, desiring to be rid of his companions, had moved a little apart. Startled by the conductor's warning, he turned quickly to catch on to the train. As he did so something struck him on the head. Whether it was a deliberate blow, or whether he had knocked himself against some unseen obstacle, he had no time just then to think, nor could he ever afterwards feel certain about it. All he could recall was falling or being pushed back from the train and down among some loose rocks beside the permanent way. For a few moments he may have been unconscious; but he soon got himself together, scrambled to his feet, and climbed on to the track. It was quickly done, but not quickly enough, for the train was no longer there. Seeing a red light close in front, Fraser shouted and hurried forward. But it was no use. Every moment the train was gathering speed, nor was it likely that his voice any more than his feet could overtake it. The light grew

dim, flickered, disappeared; the thunder subsided into a rumbling, and soon the last echoes died away. All was still, and the young man stood a solitary figure on the track. He had been "left," to use the brief word by which western folk describe such an awkward situation.

It was not all at once that Fraser Fairhope realized the seriousness of his position. Indeed, for a few moments, the thing seemed to be a good joke—but then he began to think. He was there in a desolate region of which he knew nothing. There was no indication of human presence, no indication of human activity, save the narrow track on which the moonlight was now beginning to glint. Hour after hour the train had passed through country of a similar character—trees, rocks, lakes, followed by more trees, more rocks, more lakes. For two hours there had been no stop, so that possibly the nearest human dwelling to the east was forty miles away. What might lie to the west Fraser unfortunately had no means of knowing. There might be a station within a very few miles, or there might not be.

While debating with himself what he ought to do, and in which direction he ought to turn, Fraser became aware that his face was bleeding. Searching in his pocket for a handkerchief, he made the disagreeable discovery that a little bag, in which he had placed his winnings together with his own money, was missing. He remembered slipping the bag into his side coat-pocket as he left the car, and he fancied that he had kept his hand on it all through. Perhaps it had dropped out when he fell or was pushed down. That did not seem

likely, nor did a prolonged search about the spot result in any discovery. Then Fraser felt sure that he had been robbed. A hazy recollection came floating into his mind of an arm that had crept round his waist from behind. Yes, he was sure now that he had felt a hand in his pocket. Then, instantaneously, the cruel blow had followed, inflicted, as he believed, by the butt of a pistol or some such blunt weapon. Poor Fraser felt his wounded head, and then he felt his pockets. They were empty. His watch was gone, and all his money—all save one quarter dollar and a few cents.

But it was necessary to do something. It was getting very cold, and the young man felt that if he was to escape perishing he must find shelter or at least keep moving. He thought for a few moments, and then turned his face eastward and hurried along the track. He had decided on this course for a very sufficient reason. The next west-bound train would pass on the following evening, and it was of the utmost importance that he should meet it in the daylight. The further east he got the more chance there would be of this; but if he went west the train would overtake him in the night, and he would probably be passed unheeded. Every step eastward was therefore a lengthening of to-morrow's daylight, and if only his strength enabled him to make five and twenty or thirty miles, he would be pretty safe if the train was anything like "on time."

Fraser had walked steadily for about an hour, revolving many things in his mind, when a rumbling sound attracted his attention. It seemed

to come from behind him, and rose and fell with a sort of rhythmic cadence, sometimes dying away, and anon swelling louder and nearer than before. Fraser paused. He stopped and listened, and then the ringing sound that came along the frosty metals told him what it was. It was the east-bound train. A few moments later twinkling lights became visible, and then, as Fraser stood back from the line, he saw the full length of the train as it wheeled like a gleaming serpent round a wooded curve.

Moments of intense excitement and anxiety followed. Never did shipwrecked mariner watch the passing sail with more eagerness. As the train drew near, Fraser fancied that the speed was being checked; surely it was moving slower, surely he would be able to attract attention! He could see the illuminated figures of the men on the engine, and he noted how the light gleamed from the furnace on the spokes of the ponderous "cow-catcher." Unfortunately it was now quite dark, the moon having sunk behind the tall motionless trees that hemmed in the line on either side. Poor Fraser could see all too plainly, but he knew that his chances of being seen were of the smallest. He did his best, however, standing on a rocky height, waving his coat, and shouting himself hoarse. Then, as the locomotive thundered on, he dropped his coat and threw down stones in the hope of attracting attention. But it was no use. Probably the missiles fell wide of the mark, though once, as the driver swung himself out on the footplate and looked into the night, poor Fraser's heart leaped into his mouth. But no, he had not been seen.

The train, laden with kindly hearted, sympathetic fellow-creatures, rushed on like a meteor streak across the wilderness, and in a few moments nothing but the dwindling tail-light was distinguishable in the distance.

The utter futility of his efforts to attract attention in the night served to impress Fraser yet more keenly with the importance of securing that his next effort should be made in the daylight. So he pressed resolutely forward, walking all the long night through, and never halting till the sun had risen and was pouring his cheering beams through the vistas of the forest. Two or three log huts were passed by the weary traveller, but they were tenantless ruins left to decay since the days of the construction. Once a wreath of blue smoke rising among the trees cheered poor Fraser with the assurance that he was at last within reach of human succour. But alas! it turned out to be a forest fire, by which, indeed, he stood and warmed himself before hurrying on. Not till the sun was high in heaven and he was faint with exhaustion did the brave fellow allow himself an hour for rest. Then choosing a sunny spot, he lay down and almost immediately fell asleep. Two hours later he started up in terror lest he should have overslept himself and allowed the train to pass. Then he rose and struggled on a few more miles till fatigue drew him down once more.

The declining sun showed that the afternoon was now closing in, so, after a further rest, Fraser began to make preparation for the critical moment. This he did with considerable deliberation. He chose a place where the track was clear and almost

straight for several miles. Then he cut a light pole and fixed it so that it overhung the metals, while his white handkerchief fluttered from the top. No engine-driver, he thought, could fail to notice such a signal. A little further down the line he took his own station on a grassy knoll and waited. For a time he had hard work to keep awake, but as the sun dropped to the horizon feverish anxiety banished every thought of sleep. Everything depended on the train being "on time," or at least not much behind.

The sun disappeared, and soon the twilight began to gather. Fraser watched his little fluttering signal till its white seemed to him to become confused with the grey of the sky. Time passed on. It might be an hour after sunset now, and not a sound broke the stillness of the clear, cold evening. Nay, what was that? Did his ears deceive him, or was there a sound as of very distant thunder away to the east? Fraser slipped from his post of observation and lay down on the track, listening intently. Confused murmurs seemed to thrill along the metals, and the telegraph wires overhead mocked him with their singing. He could make nothing of it, and so climbed to his former position. Then suddenly there came through the evening air a distinct, palpitating sound. There could be no mistake; it was the clank, clank, of an approaching train. Soon the sound seemed to be everywhere, and Fraser's heart leaped to his mouth as he distinguished a black speck at the end of the long vista where the rails had appeared to meet against the sky. But it seemed an age before the speck grew appreciably larger, and meanwhile it was as



THEY SAW THE LONE FIGURE FAINTLY WAVING A WEARY ARM.

Page 117.

though unseen hands were busy hanging veils of darkness from tree to tree and crag to crag.

But the darkness was in the eyes of the feverish and exhausted wanderer. Those on board the train could see plainly enough. They saw the signal flag, indeed it bobbed into the face of the engine-driver; they saw the lone figure faintly waving a weary arm, then the panting engine came to an abrupt standstill in the midst of the lonely forest glade. Three or four men ascended the knoll and assisted the forlorn and fainting man to descend. There was not much talk, but enough of prompt and kindly action. Fraser Fairhope blessed the dining-car that night, and he also thoroughly appreciated the comforts of the first-class sleeping-car.

Next afternoon, however, he found himself standing friendless and alone on the platform of Winnipeg station, with just eighty-three cents in his pocket.





CHAPTER XI.

THE DREGS OF THE CUP.

HAD Fraser been wise he would have made use of the introduction which Mr. Sharples had given him to one of the leading clergymen in Winnipeg. But a sense of shame held him back. He could not bear to confess his folly to any one, and proudly resolved to work his way unassisted out of the miserable condition in which he found himself. Similar motives deterred him from writing home. From the truth he shrank, and a falsehood he would not tell. So he would wait until he found himself on his feet again.

For several days the poor, foolish fellow wandered about the great, raw, half-built "city of the future," seeking work or employment of any sort. But winter was now approaching, and there was but little to do. He got an odd job or two, which sufficed to keep him from starving, but the work was alike precarious and utterly distasteful. The one consolation was that nobody knew him, and he vowed that he would draw a veil for ever over the straits and hardships to which he was again and again reduced.

One day, or rather one night, when his fortunes were at their ebb, Fraser was making his way to the miserable lodging that was now his only home, when a man, who was considerably under the influence of drink, staggered up against him. Fraser put out his arm to keep the fellow from falling, and, as he did so, he recognized him by the glare of the electric light. It was his old travelling companion, the self-sufficient Liverpool clerk.

"Hullo, Myres! it's you, is it? I didn't know you were in Winnipeg," exclaimed Fraser, who, in his misery and loneliness, was glad to find some one whom he might claim as a friend.

"You've the advantage of me, I reckon, guv'nor. We haven't been introduced, have we?" was the response, uttered with tipsy gravity.

"Don't you remember? We travelled together from Montreal," said Fraser.

"Oh, now I know you—you're the chap as wanted to fight because I called you the heathen Chinee—the chap wot as cleared us greenhorns out and then got left himself. You seem down in your luck, so let's cry quits and go and have a drink."

Evidently Mr. Myres was too large-hearted to bear malice, for he forthwith linked his arm within Fraser's and proceeded to tow him down the street.

"I think you've had enough drink for to-night, and it's not much that I take," replied Fraser, who, nevertheless, did not feel unwilling to accompany his new-found friend.

"Well, I know a crib where I can get a cup of coffee, and where you can try your luck with some of those little games that you don't understand.

Now, don't take offence—there is none meant, old pal, I can assure you."

So, chattering by the way and laughing boisterously at his own humour, Myres conducted Fraser down a side street and into a place that had all the appearance of a low gambling den. Cups of hot coffee were procured, and then Mr. Myres, who had sobered down a little, was quite ready to impart all the information that Fraser might require of him.

"By Jingo! didn't we have a laugh when that American boss came strolling into the car and inquiring what had become of your reverence, for we had got into the way of calling you the parson before you took to playing that game you didn't understand. We didn't do it after, having too much respect for the cloth. 'Well,' said I to him, 'it's you ought to know, for you were close beside him when the shout came, "All aboard!"' Then he swore that he had never noticed you, it having taken him all his time to catch on for himself."

Fraser told of the blow that he had received and of the loss of his money, looking keenly and rather suspiciously at Myres as he did so. But that ingenuous youth was not formed of the stuff whence murderers and highwaymen are turned out. He listened with interest, and then said, with an air of profound cuteness—

"I reckon that American was too many for the lot of us. He collared your winnings, and he cleared the rest of us pretty well out, you bet, before he had done with us."

"What became of those two young farmer chaps—I forget their names?" inquired Fraser.

"Oh, they went on up the line to Brandon, or Calgary, or somewhere ; but I can tell you, sir, their pockets were a good deal lighter by the time they cleared from Winnipeg. The American cleaned me out first, and then he worked at them till at last they did a bunk and sloped." And Myres roared as though it was all an excellent joke.

"And what sphere for your talents have you found in Winnipeg, may I ask ?" And Fraser, as he asked the question, regarded his genial companion with an expression of mingled amusement and contempt.

"I expect I am like you, sir—waiting for something to turn up," replied Myres, cheerfully ; "but meantime, scorning to be idle, I have accepted a subordinate position at the Manitoba Hotel. I make myself useful, and—well, I may whisper it to you in strict confidence—I am not above attending to the boots. Imagine it, sir, for a business man—a man of education, who has occupied a position of trust in one of the leading shipping firms in the world ! But, of course, it is merely temporary—something suitable may turn up any day. Meantime, it's a blessing no one knows anything about a fellow here."

"I've had reason to say that pretty often these last few weeks," assented Fraser.

Then, the ice having been broken, he poured out the whole tale of his misfortunes into Myres' big but sympathetic ears. And Myres, being a kind-hearted chap at bottom, and having himself felt the pinch of adversity, was quite ready to stretch forth a helping hand to a brother in ad-

versity. He promised to do what he could, and he was as good as his word. Two days later, Fraser Fairhope found himself one of the staff of the Manitoba Hotel. True, his position was a very humble one—we scarcely like to say how humble—but he was sure of food and shelter, besides certain dollars per month, for the winter.

Such are the changes of men in a new country that even this humble start might have been the beginning of a successful career, had Fraser Fairhope had the grace to profit by the lesson that had been so sharply taught him. But a change had come over his character, or rather—since character does not really change thus easily—circumstances had developed what had hitherto been latent tendencies and imperfections. The gambling spirit had been aroused, and the young man's chief thought during the winter was so to increase his few hard-earned dollars that when spring broke he might have some capital with which to push out into the open country. Accordingly, he became a too frequent visitor to the saloon to which Myres had first introduced him—ay, and to worse places too. For a time he was successful; so that by a month after Christmas he had got together such an imposing pile that he was foolish enough to throw up his situation at the hotel.

"Now," he said to himself, "being no longer a shoeblack, I will write home and tell them how I am getting on."

Then conscience asked the question, "*How are you getting on, and towards what are you getting?*" And the reply being confused and unsatisfactory, Fraser determined to postpone writing till

he could say that he had "dropped into" something, and could describe himself otherwise than as a successful gambler in a small way of business.

But while he thus waited an opportunity, the ill-gotten hoard was rapidly dwindling. What with gambling losses, the cost of living in idleness, and standing drinks to Myres and other friends, Fraser was in a fair way to be a pauper once more. He felt that there was nothing for it but to move on; so one fine day, though it was yet too early in the season for farming operations, he "did a bunk," as his lively friend would have expressed it, and took the afternoon train for Brandon, a town which ranks in Manitoba only second to Winnipeg, from which place it is distant something about a hundred miles. At Brandon, Fraser had the good fortune—for it was good fortune, considering the time of the year—to fall in with a Scotch farmer, by whom, or rather by whose wife, he was hired at a wage of fifteen dollars a month, and forthwith carried away to a homestead situated some twenty miles to the north of the railway. The Scotchman's name was Finlay, and it was because her good-man was now sorely crippled by rheumatism that Mrs. Finlay had taken such prompt measures to secure the presence of an able-bodied man on their remote and isolated holding. Twelve years before, Finlay, then an active man in the prime of life, had "homesteaded" on a half-section with his wife and three children. He had made the place, and was now a comparatively rich man. But he was a cripple, and the children were all dead. Still, though the man and his wife were now a soured, silent pair, the work had to be done;

and so, for the first time, a hired help was reluctantly called in.

On Finlay's homestead young Fairhope learnt, for the first time in his life, what hard work really meant. It was Mrs. Finlay that taught him the lesson, and, as she never spared herself one moment from morn till eve, the hired man could not well repine. Fraser's idea of "farming in Manitoba" had hitherto been of a delightfully simple character. The process consisted, as he pictured it, in waiting till the hot sun had thawed a few inches of the ground that had been roughly ploughed the previous fall; then you drilled in a lot of wheat; then you fooled about and did what you liked all summer; then you made a superhuman effort to get in your phenomenal crop; then you did a bit more ploughing; then you went to sleep for the winter, only waking up to haul some grain to market, or to visit your friends. This sort of life, with its brief periods of exertion and long intervals of repose, would, he felt sure, suit him "down to the ground." Cuthbert, indeed, had always poured foul scorn on such a life, holding up as *his* ideal that of the ranchman—which was to consist in riding about the country, shooting game, and having an occasional eye to your herds. But the farming at Finlay's being of a "mixed" character, and not on a very large scale, involved constant anxiety and endless labour. There was wood to be chopped and hauled a considerable distance, both for fuel and for fencing. Then there was the stock to be attended to, and preparations to be made for seed-sowing, so soon as ever the relaxing grip of winter on the land would permit.

But though the work was hard to bear, Fraser found the solitude and silence yet more intolerable. For days he scarce spoke or heard a word spoken. The nearest neighbour was seven miles away, and with Finlay and his wife he did not seem to have an idea in common. He felt himself absolutely cut off from the world and from every human interest. There was but one compensation, namely, that he had no opportunity of spending his money. Small as was the wage for that country, the forty-five unbroken dollars were to the good at the end of the three months. Nor was Finlay slack about paying. He meant to get his money's worth, but he meant to pay—though it was pain and grief to him—for what he got.

And now, for perhaps the second time, Fraser Fairhope threw away his opportunity. Unwilling to lose a sober and trustworthy servant, and actually *squirming* at the thought of having to plank down his greasy dollar notes, Finlay offered Fraser a partnership. Twenty dollars was to be paid in cash, and in lieu of the balance Fraser was to receive a one-fourth interest in the farm and stock. There was also the prospect of an eventual sole possession.

"The guidwife and me are lone folks in the world," said the crippled old farmer, pathetically. "And it's often thinking long we are for the time when it will be allowed for us to follow the wains that the Lord took from us. So it's not long you might have to thole our ways and our grumblings. And though I'll mak na promise binding and for sure, yet this I'll say, that I'll deal fair by the man as deals fair by me. The Lord be witness between thee and me for that."

Ah, foolish Fraser Fairhope! What vain dreams of "luck" and unearned wealth have befooled your reason and muddled your conscience? What restless craving for change and excitement and novelty is this that has paralyzed your will, and driven clean away those honourable resolves that once you cherished of making a home for your father and sister, and acting as pioneer of your brothers' fortunes? Ah! if only you had written home and told the truth—however bitter it might be to tell or hear! If only you had now some responsive written pledges of forgiveness, sweet assurances of love, and hope, and confidence yet unshaken! But no, you would not have it so. So now you must lie on the bed that you have made, and reap the bitter fruit of your selfish, heedless sowing.

The truth was—though the young man did not realize it at the time—that he could not resist the itching of his palm to grasp a definite, if not very large, sum of money. With money in his hand, he might "try his luck" in this manner or in that. To a man so infected with the modern gambling germ, mere ownership and property has no charm.

So Fraser Fairhope persisted in his determination to leave Finlay's at the expiration of his three months.





CHAPTER XII.

THE SHADOW OF FATE.



ON leaving Finlay's, Fraser took the train to Calgary, which is the last station of any importance to the east of the Rocky Mountains. This rising town is beautifully situated, and has the advantage of being well watered by the streams which flow from the eternal snow-covered peaks, which are here visible all along the western horizon. Calgary is a ranching centre, and somebody having assured Fraser that more money was to be made out of that form of industry than out of agriculture, he resolved, in his restless eagerness to be rich, to try it. So he established himself at the renowned "Alberta" hotel, and set himself to make inquiries. Coming and going at the "Alberta," he met quite a number of young fellows of birth and education; and, influenced by their general style and conversation, he soon concluded that Bert had been right in extolling the ranchman's life as preferable to any other.

But though he had a good time of it for several

days, Fraser felt that he was not getting appreciably nearer to making his fortune, while he *was* getting appreciably nearer the bottom of his purse. So, when he heard of a possible opening at a ranch some forty miles away, he was glad enough to go and look after it. Accordingly, he paid his bill, and took the train—which passes Calgary, going both ways, in the middle of the night—to a small flag-station, which would bring him to within eight or ten miles of his destination. The train that day was many hours behind time, in consequence of a “mud-slide” among the mountains ; but still Fraser found himself dropped with ample time in which to complete his lonely walk before nightfall.

That is, if he had started at once—but that was just what the foolish fellow did not do. Having fallen in with a couple of pleasant companions, he had sauntered with them into a little saloon that stood in the midst of a rising village, about the eighth of a mile from the station. It was certainly desirable to get some breakfast, but it was not desirable to spend three or four hours subsequently in “fooling around” and card-playing. But once more the besetting sin had cast its toils round the victim of a miserable infatuation, and when, late in the afternoon, Fraser started on his way it was with empty pockets and a heavy heart.

The track to Smooth Rock ranch, whither our pedestrian was bound, was sufficiently well defined, and, so long as daylight lasted, even a stranger could not easily go wrong. But as Fraser Fairhope pursued his solitary and melancholy way the twilight began to fall ; and partly owing to this and partly to the abstraction of his bitter thoughts, he

gradually wandered very wide of the path. Suddenly waking from a bitter reverie, he found himself on the borders of a morass. He knew at once that he had lost his way, since he had been warned that the trail lay along the sloping ground quite half a mile from the marshy land and reed-smothered lake, in the neighbourhood of which he now found himself floundering.

Fraser stood still and considered his position. It was by no means pleasant. The grey obscurity of evening was gathering round. There was no vestige of a track, nor was it possible to see more than a few yards in any direction. The only thing to do was to make for the higher ground ; but that did not prove an easy matter. The place seemed quite flat, and it was but a choice of evils advancing or retreating, turning to the right or to the left. However, after groping about aimlessly for a quarter of an hour, Fraser found himself on a slight elevation. Here he paused again by the side of a stunted tree to study, from this slight ground of vantage, his geographical surroundings.

Suddenly the welcome sound of human voices came borne on the evening breeze to the wanderer's ear. Lifting himself a little by the aid of the tree by which he stood, and anxiously looking out over the rushes, Fraser perceived two men on horseback advancing apparently in a direct line towards him. He was about to call out when something checked him. The men were evidently engaged in vehement altercation, and, moreover, as they drew nearer, one voice—if not both—struck familiarly on Fraser's quick ear. Dropping back from his strained position, Fraser waited unseen

while the men approached. Then he heard the words uttered with anger—

“I call it a swindle. There is no other name for it.”

Then came the reply, spoken in a soft but sneering tone—

“That is an ugly word, and may possibly lead to ugly consequences.”

Raising himself a little, Fraser at once recognized the last speaker. It was the man Parker, who had been his *bête noire* during the voyage, and to whom he had done such an unwilling service on the landing-stage of Quebec. Neither did the other man seem unfamiliar, but in his annoyance at seeing Parker, young Fairhope did not pause to think who it might be. Determined not to be under any obligation to one for whom he had conceived a violent antipathy, he accordingly kept himself close till the two disputants had passed on.

When the sound of voices had died away, Fraser rose to his feet. Then, concluding that the travellers were making towards the railway, he struck their trail and pursued it in the opposite direction. He had not gone far when he noticed an object lying in the long grass beside the track. It was a loaded revolver, and it had evidently not been lying there long, since it was quite bright and free from rust. “Dropped by Parker or the other fellow,” said Fraser to himself, as he picked up the weapon—and yet scarcely dropped, since it did not lie upon the beaten track, but a little to one side, as though it had been thrown there. Fraser just noted the point, but drew no conclusion from it as he hastened on his way. In a few minutes more

he struck the beaten wheel track from the railway, and wondered how he had ever been so stupid or preoccupied as to lose it.

It was now getting quite dark, but the road was plain enough, and a light in the distance seemed to indicate the direction in which Smooth Rock ranch lay. But that light took longer to reach than Fraser had anticipated, and it was a fagged out and bewildered man who, late at night, startled the occupants of Smooth Rock ranch by his timid, apologetic knocking.

Two women started from their seats, and while one advanced to the door, lamp in hand, the other stood in the background with her restraining hand on the head of a huge mastiff.

"Who is knocking there?" demanded a firm, but soft and cultivated voice.

"I'm a traveller in search of work. They told me at Calgary a man was wanting here. I am late because I lost my way in coming from the depôt. I suppose this is Smooth Rock ranch."

"Yes, this is the place. But who told you in Calgary that we wanted a man?" was the next question.

The name given was probably reassuring, for the woman opened the door and held the lamp high so as to take a survey of her untimely visitor.

"I am ashamed, ma'am, to trouble you at such an hour, but, indeed, I could not help it. You will not refuse me a night's shelter, even if there is no work for me. May I speak with the master?" And poor Fraser felt that his voice was faltering as he made the appeal.

"The master is away, unfortunately, but walk

through into the kitchen and our ranchman will see to your comfort. Of course you must rest here to-night."

Fraser accepted the invitation and walked down the passage toward the brightly lighted room which he saw beyond, conscious not only that the two women were watching him suspiciously, but that the dog was merely awaiting instructions to decide what line of action he should take.

With instinctive politeness, Fraser had taken off his hat as he entered the house, and now, as he stood in the full light of the kitchen lamp, his face was plainly visible.

"Why, I know you quite well," exclaimed the woman, who had hitherto been occupied with the dog. "You are Mr.—Mr.—you know, Bella—the young fellow out of the intermediate who sang so splendidly at our concert."

Fraser Fairhope gave a start; he looked up eagerly and saw that it was Nellie Fergie who stood before him.

"What!" he cried, "is it really you, Miss Fergie, and—and Miss Wood? How strange that we should meet in this way."

"Yes," replied Nellie, "the same people, but not the same names quite. This lady is now my brother's wife. You remember Jack? We live here together and have a sort of joint-stock farm."

"Ah, that is it; I thought I knew the voice. It must have been he that I met this afternoon—your brother, Mr. Fergie."

"Did he not recognize you? Did not you ask him the way? Why, if you had you would have been here two hours ago," exclaimed Mrs. Fergie.

"No, we did not speak. I think he did not see me. I thought I knew the road," stammered Fraser. He was thinking of the odious Parker and endeavouring to swallow the nauseous conviction that Nellie had become his wife as part of the "joint-stock" arrangement.

"Well—well, we must get you some supper, for you seem ready to faint," said Bella, good-naturedly. "Send Sir Roger to call up Jim, Nellie, and then go and see what there is to eat in the house."

Nellie, thus instructed, opened a back door, and the dog, in obedience to a whispered word, bounded into the darkness, giving utterance to a succession of sonorous barks. Then she went off to forage in the larder.

In two or three minutes the dog returned, and Fraser was startled by the apparition of a tall, powerful-looking Indian, who had slipped noiselessly into the room.

"This is Moose-jaw Jim, our right-hand man," said Bella. "He will show you where you are to sleep, and when you come back there will be something for you to eat."

Moose-jaw made a sign, and Fraser followed obediently towards the out-building, wherein the Indian himself had his quarters.

Meanwhile, Nellie having returned, the two friends had a few minutes in which to discuss their guest.

"I do not think your hero has improved; he has a seedy, reckless look about him that I do not like," began Mrs. Fergie.

"Why should you call him *my* hero, I should like to know," retorted Nellie. "The only thing

I admired about him was his voice. You know I never spoke half a dozen words to the young man, except about the concert."

"Well, you spoke much more than half a dozen words *about* him afterwards—quite enough to make his ears tingle a thousand miles away. We heard no end of beautiful things about his pathetic expression and gentlemanly manners. You know Mr. Parker was quite jealous." And the young wife glanced at her friend as she spoke.

"I wish, Bella, you wouldn't be ridiculous, and I wish, above all things, you wouldn't mention that man's odious name," cried the girl, angrily. "I don't deny that I was interested in Mr. Fairhope. Any one could see that he was a gentleman; and it certainly was sad for him to have nobody to associate with but those people in the intermediate."

"He does not seem to have had much better company since," said Mrs. Fergie; "and I confess there is a hesitancy and want of straightforwardness about his manner that I don't like."

"You never did like him—I am aware of that," began Nellie, with flashing eye. But the subject of their discussion entering at that moment, she stopped abruptly.

An embarrassed silence followed, till Mrs. Fergie relieved it by saying, somewhat stiffly—

"I am sorry my husband is away. He is going to Calgary by to-night's train, and will not be back for a week. It is a pity you did not re-introduce yourself to him, because then you might have come to some arrangement. But if you like to stay till his return, I know it will be a help to Jim, for we are very short of hands for our spring work."

Poor Fraser felt himself "set down" by this speech. To be snubbed for not having spoken to Mr. Fergie and to be called a "hand" in Nellie's presence was not pleasant. However, he concealed his feelings and answered politely that he would be glad to do his best and give every assistance in his power till Jack's return.

But there was balm ready for the poor fellow's wounded pride.

"You must tell us your adventures, Mr. Fairhope, as soon as you have had something to eat and have rested awhile. Business can wait till to-morrow. If we had a piano, we might have some music."

Nellie said this with her most bewitching smile on the hungry "hand," and her fiercest frown in the direction of her brother's wife.

"It is very kind of you, Miss Fergie, to take such an interest in a poor fellow like me; but I am afraid you won't think the better of me when you hear my story," replied Fraser, modestly.

So, when supper was over, the story—with some surely pardonable omissions—was told. Nellie Fergie did not say how the narration affected her, yet was there more of pity than of anger or contempt in her sweet face as she listened. Bella also refrained from verbal criticism, but there was nought save reprobation and impatience written on her handsome face.

Two days elapsed, during which Fraser Fairhope saw but little of the ladies at Smooth Rock ranch. He found plenty of work cut out for him by Moose-jaw Jim, and into this he threw himself with feverish excitement. He scorned himself; he was ashamed and angry. And in that state of mind he took

absolute pleasure in punishing himself with hardship and privation. He did not know which galled the more—Bella Fergie's contempt or Nellie's pity. So he kept out of the way as much as possible, and scarce spoke a word to any one.

On the third day, Mrs. Fergie thinking it probable that there would be a letter from her husband, Fraser volunteered to walk across country to the depôt. This offer of service was accepted, but a horse was placed at Fraser's disposal, and he was further entrusted with several small commissions by Nellie.

Being well mounted and a good rider, Fraser was not long in getting over the ground between Smooth Rock and the Canadian Pacific Railway. His first care was to execute Nellie's commissions; his second, to call at the post-office. There was no letter from Jack Fergie, neither was there any message from him at the depôt. Indeed, the station-master exhibited surprise when the inquiry was made, since he had no idea that Fergie was from home, and expressed himself absolutely confident that he had not boarded any recent train at that depôt. Fraser next called at the hotel where he had wasted so many hours on the day of his arrival, for there he was told Jack Fergie would have put up his horse. But here again no information was to be had. Both horse and rider were well known, but of neither had anything been seen for three weeks.

What could it all mean? What had become of Jack Fergie? What had been the outcome of that fierce dispute with Parker? Where was Parker himself? These were the questions that Fraser

asked himself, with troubled mind, as he rode back to the ranch. The conviction of something wrong, a great horror as of some impending tragedy, grew upon him as he sped along the road he now knew so well. He noted the place where the track diverged towards the swampy lake, and the new question sprang into his mind—Why should any man, making for the railway depôt, have turned down there? Where could Parker and his companion have been going to when they passed so close to him on that memorable evening? Then he recalled the position in which the pistol had been found, and the incident seemed to be full of significance.

Thus, when Fraser rode up to the homestead at Smooth Rock, his face already displayed the turmoil and anxiety of his mind. He told his tale to the two women as he stood holding his horse's mane. They listened with wonder and growing alarm, while, close beside the horse's head, the tall Indian regarded the narrator with piercing, suspicious eyes.

"You hear what he says, what do you think of it, Jim?" inquired Mrs. Fergie, anxiously.

"I hear what he says, but thought has not had time to be born. I fear for my master, though, in Lone Lake swamp. Those who wander there come seldom back to tell what they have seen." The Indian spoke in a low, monotonous voice. He spoke deliberately, and never for an instant did he take his eyes off Fraser Fairhope.

Bella Fergie staggered back with a sharp cry, and rested her head on Nellie's shoulder.

"Oh, Jack is lost—he has been swallowed up in

those horrible quagmires ! But what could have induced him to go there—what could have led him astray ? ”

There was a silence, each looking helplessly on the other members of the group. Then a sharp warning note from Sir Roger caused them to look round. A man was riding towards the house in leisurely style. Instantly recognizing Parker, Fraser took his horse by the bridle to lead him to the stable. But as he was about to do so, the Indian's hand laid on his shoulder arrested him, and he found himself fascinated by the extraordinary glitter of the wide-open black eyes.

“ You stay here. Stand and let *him* hear what you have told the women. Let him judge—he is a man that sees very far.”

When Parker dismounted, Fraser was surprised to see that, while Bella received him heartily enough, Nellie scarcely returned his salutation. The “ joint-stock ” theory was instantaneously exploded ; but before Fraser could even experience a sensation of joy, he was carried away with amazement at what he heard next.

“ And where is Jack—the admirable, hard-working Jack ? ” inquired Mr. Parker.

“ We have just been talking about him,” explained Bella. “ He left us three days ago to go to the depôt, and now it appears that he has never been there. What can it mean ? where can he be ? ”

“ Changed his great mind, perhaps,” said Parker, lightly. “ But do you mean to say he has not returned—not sent any message ? ”

“ You were to have met him in Calgary, were you not ? ” inquired Nellie.

"There was some talk of it, but he never turned up at the Alberta. I can't say I much expected him."

"We were wondering if he could have lost his way in the Lone Lake quagmires," said Bella, in a trembling voice.

"Hardly likely. Was he alone?" replied Parker, gravely.

Fraser, who had only now recovered his wits and found his tongue, sprang forward.

"How can you ask if he was alone when I saw you riding by his side?" he demanded impetuously. "You, if any man, must know what has become of Jack Fergie."





CHAPTER XIII.

IN LONE LAKE SWAMP.

THE two men glowered at each other as they had done once before, but Parker did not recognize his accuser. For a moment he turned livid with rage or fear; then, quickly recovering himself, he asked quietly—

“Who is this fellow, and what does he know about it?”

“He arrived here a few hours after Jack started, and he spoke of having met him on the way,” explained Bella.

“Ah, and did he make this remarkable assertion about my being along with Jack?” The question was coolly asked, but Fraser noticed that the speaker’s clenched fist was twitching nervously.

“No, I certainly understood him that Jack was alone. This is the first we have heard of any one being with him,” was the decisive reply.

“I thought as much,” said Mr. Parker. “This is a serious matter and must be looked into at once. Let us follow up the trail without a moment’s delay. It seems to me,” he added,

addressing the two ladies in an undertone, "that this man is either a maniac or a murderer."

Fraser had been so thunderstruck at Parker's audacity that he had not uttered a word. He now looked at Miss Fergie, and saw that she was regarding him with a frightened yet appealing look. Then turning, he found that the Indian had slipped up close to his side, as though ready to pounce upon him should he attempt to escape.

"This is a most unblushing and outrageous lie."

"Yes, I should think it is," assented Parker with a sneer.

"You certainly never mentioned having seen any one with my brother," said Nellie, in response to a despairing look from the unfortunate young man.

"I know that. It was not necessary, and—and—I did not choose to mention *his* name."

"And how did you know my name, may I ask? I have not the honour of your acquaintance, have I?" interrupted Mr. Parker.

"We have met before—the last time on the quay at Quebec," said Fraser.

"Ah, I remember now. You are the fellow that fished up my coat and then told me so politely that you wouldn't have done it had you known the coat was mine. A most promising youth. Excuse my having forgotten you; I really ought to have been more impressed." The words were spoken with affected carelessness, but there came a softened, troubled expression over the speaker's face that puzzled Fraser.

"I will go with you and point out the spot where

I met Mr. Fergie and his travelling companion. Moose-jaw shall be witness."

"It is well spoken," assented the Indian. "Sir Roger and Moose-jaw will lead the way."

"I think it would be better to send for the sheriff and to give this fellow in charge," said Parker, as he sprang into his saddle.

"But why should you conclude that Jack has met with violence, or that a crime has been committed? I won't think it, unless I am compelled to," exclaimed Nellie.

"Well, Miss Fergie, I don't wish to alarm you unnecessarily, but I must say matters look very black, and I don't want this fellow lost sight of till they are cleared up."

"I have no intention of losing sight of you, rest assured of that, sir," said Fraser, as he in turn mounted his horse.

"Very well, let us go together then. Only if you attempt to mizzle, you know what awaits you;" and Parker touched the revolver that was stuck ostentatiously in his belt. Then, hearing a low growl behind him, he swung round in his saddle, exclaiming—

"Call off that dog, you Indian fellow. You know I hate the beast."

And truly Sir Roger did not look reassuring of aspect as he advanced with the hair of his back erect like the bristles of a hog and walking with that stiff, restrained gait that characterizes the big dog when he is angry.

"All right, Master Parker; he and I will go on together, and you two follow where we lead." Then, after a whispered word and a pat on the head

responded to by a friendly lick, man and dog started off together at a steady trot; the two horsemen followed up behind.

For a few minutes the men were silent. Then Parker said abruptly—

“Do you not think we had better come to an understanding over this business? Whatever your feelings may be towards me, I have no desire to injure you—far from it, indeed.”

“What do you mean?” responded Fraser. “You have told a whopping lie, and you know it.”

“Your language is not polite, my young friend; but let us stick to the point.”

“Do you deny that it was you who were riding by Mr. Fergie’s side last Tuesday evening?”

“I do deny it, and can bring evidence to prove that I was at least a hundred miles away at that time.”

Fraser was staggered a moment at the man’s cool audacity.

“I could swear to it, I can repeat your words,” he exclaimed.

“You can swear to what you like, but the question is, my downy friend, what the public or a jury will believe. You say that I was there, I can prove I wasn’t. Moreover, you never let fall a word about this till you found you were getting into trouble yourself. But that you were in the neighbourhood you do not attempt to deny. Again, I am Fergie’s friend and partner, but who are you? a tramp without a cent in his pocket, professing to be on the look-out for a job. I say without a cent, because I suspect you are the chap they told me about this morning at Simpson’s saloon, who

stayed there playing all Tuesday afternoon till he was cleaned out. Then I can picture you coming along in anything but an amiable state of mind. You meet a solitary traveller—rather a feeble young man—in an out-of-the-way place. You have a little *do* together, and then, when it is dark, you turn up at a lonely ranch where there would be only two women in the house. But there happened to be a big dog there too, and an ugly Indian in the background, so you keep a civil tongue in your head and say you are in search of work. Then you bide a wee till the time comes for discovering that the master is missing. Perhaps you would have found him this afternoon, even without my help—and perhaps you wouldn't."

"Do you remember what you said, 'swindling is an ugly word and may lead to ugly consequences'? you seem to take it for granted that poor Jack Fergie has been murdered. You had the brutality to tell his wife and sister as much," retorted Fraser.

Mr. Parker winced visibly, but was not otherwise disturbed.

"I am sorry if I left Mrs. Fergie and Nellie under that impression," he said quietly; "but I repeat, the question between you and me is not of what actually has happened, but of what an intelligent jury will think. You see the position you are in, and that if Fergie is found dead, you, and no one else, will be had up for murdering him."

"And you alone will know the truth," said Fraser.

"It is not I who will have the trying of you, you stupid, or the hanging either," replied Parker,

impatiently ; "it will be out of my power by-and-by ; but just now I can do you a good turn. Had you not better make tracks and clear out ?"

"Ay, and be shot before I had gone five yards."

"Honour bright, no ; I only said that to impress the ladies. You may trust me to miss, if I do fire, or, if you like, I will drop my six-shooter and tell the Indian fellow that my horse stumbled."

If Fraser Fairhope hesitated a moment it was not the result of fear but of absolute amazement at the cold-blooded villainy of the man beside him. He saw with horror how strong was the case that might be made against him, but to do him justice he never hesitated as to his duty.

"You mistake your man, villain. I shall see this matter through and tell the simple truth, whatever the result may be," he said firmly.

"As you like. Add your illustrious name to the long list of martyrs to the cause of truth. Only please to keep your wool on and speak civil. It's stupid and irritating to call names. Suppose we ride on, old Moose-jaw has got a good deal ahead."

"Yes, we had better," assented Fraser. Then without another word they pressed forward.

They were now gaining rapidly on the Indian and the dog, when Parker, having let his companion get some yards in advance, drew his revolver and fired, shouting out as he did so—

"Stop this instant, you scamp, or I'll fire again. Stop, I say!"

The Indian turned round, and at the same moment Fraser drew up his horse.

"What do you mean by this, you cowardly ruffian ?" he shouted.

"What do you mean by trying to give us the slip? I've watched your little game for some time back," retorted Parker, riding up.

Moose-jaw looked from one to the other, and then, without a word, he slipped a leather thong that he had carried somewhere about him through Fraser's bridle, and trotted on as though nothing had happened.

Advancing thus in close order, they soon struck the spot where the narrow horse trail diverged from the beaten track. Without any hesitation the dog chose the former, plunging into the long grass with bristling back and stiffened tail.

"We leave the horses here," said the Indian, as soon as the soft ground was reached at the bottom of a gentle slope.

"What need of that? the footing is firm enough. And if he went this way at all, he must have gone on horseback," said Parker, hesitating.

"There has fallen much rain since Tuesday, and it had better be as Moose-jaw says," responded the Indian.

"I am sure you are right; we had better go afoot." And so saying Fraser slid from his saddle. Parker was obliged to give in; and so, having secured the horses, they pushed forward on foot.

That the water had risen considerably Fraser soon had evidence. He recognized the place where he had picked up the pistol; it had been quite dry, but now in passing they were above their ankles. Further on, the little hillock from which he had watched the travellers on that memorable evening now stood forth an island in the midst of surrounding slush.

"I call this rather a wild-geese chase; no man in his senses can ever have taken this road," remonstrated Parker, as they floundered on, sinking halfway to their knees at each step.

Moose-jaw turned sharply and looked suspiciously at the pair who were following.

"And what does Mr. Fairhope advise?" he inquired deferentially.

"I say, let us go on as far as we can. This is about where I saw the two men, though the water has risen since," replied Fraser.

They waded on in silence, and for a time the path became firmer and almost dry. Then, as it descended into the marsh once more, the dog startled them with a sudden yelp, and Moose-jaw, pushing the interlacing rushes aside with his long arms, displayed a terrible sight. There, in the midst of a small, trampled space, lay a human body, face downwards, on the marshy ground. The dog, Sir Roger, stood pawing the body, licking the part of the face that lay above the surface of the slimy ooze, and giving utterance at intervals to soft, plaintive cries.

"It is the man we seek—my master. How comes he to be lying here in Lone Lake swamp?" said the Indian, drawing himself up to his full height.

"Ay, that is the question, and a question that must be answered too. There has been foul play here," cried Parker, pushing forward.

Fraser said nothing. For the moment he was quite unnerved, and he stood gazing helplessly on the scene before him. He felt that, however long he might live, it would never fade from his memory.

"He was your friend ; it is right you should lift him up," said the Indian, solemnly, as he stood with his arms hanging idly by his sides.

"Call off that brute, then. Do you not see that he is ready to fly at my throat."

And in truth the aspect of Sir Roger was sufficiently alarming. He had ceased licking his dead master's face, and was standing with his two front paws on the prostrate body, showing his teeth and snarling ominously.

Moose-jaw, smiling grimly, stooped down, put his arm round the dog's neck, and drew the faithful animal gently back. Then he knelt and watched keenly while Parker lifted the dead man's head and turned the body over. As he did so a shudder passed through his entire frame, and he became ghastly pale. There was no longer any possibility of doubt. It was Jack Fergie—dead, cold, and stiff, the clothing soaked with water, and the poor face defiled with slime.

A superficial examination not resulting in the discovery of any wound, Parker suggested that perhaps, after all, the poor fellow had fallen into the mud and been suffocated ; and as he made the suggestion he looked steadily and of set purpose into Fraser's face.

"It seems a lame explanation, and, besides, what can have become of his horse?" and Fraser returned his questioner's gaze with equal steadiness.

"Ah, the horse!" muttered the Indian, whom not a word or a look had escaped. Moose-jaw rose to his feet, glanced quickly round the confined open space in which they were crowded together, then, motioning to Sir Roger to lie still,

he suddenly slipped away though the reeds and rushes and long, rank grass.

"Will you not help to lift the body? But perhaps you are afraid," said Parker.

"You know well that *I* have no cause to shrink back," retorted Fraser, angrily.

But none the less, having never been brought in contact with death in any form before, it was with trembling knees and a blanched face that he stooped to take his share of the cold, stiff, clammy burden that rose, under the joint efforts of the two bearers, with a horrid, lingering *sop* out of the hollow into which its weight had sunk it. Then, the dog following behind, they dragged rather than carried the body to the higher and firmer ground. Here they found the Indian waiting for them with an inscrutable expression on his powerful face.

"It was a queer time for you to bolt and leave us like that," said Parker, nervously.

"Moose-jaw would have returned. He went but to examine the trail where the ground was dry. The strange man said, 'What can have become of the horse?' Moose-jaw went to look for an answer."

"Well, I don't see it is of much importance," replied Parker. "Not half so important as to get the unfortunate fellow home. Lend a hand and let us lift him."

Not without considerable labour was the little island reached that Fraser seemed to know so well. Here they laid the body down, and it was arranged, after some discussion, that Parker should return to the ranch to break the terrible news and to obtain assistance.

During the two weary hours that followed the Indian never spoke, and Fraser, after the first few minutes, had given up the effort to draw anything from him. No sound broke the stillness of the afternoon. The dog had ceased to whine and was lying with his head between his paws, gazing with unwearying, wistful eyes on the motionless form of his loved master.

At last assistance arrived. A rude tressel was formed on which the body was carried over the narrow trail and through the rapidly rising water till the firm wheel-track was reached. There a light four-wheeled buggy was in waiting. The seat had been replaced by some rough planks, and on this extemporized hearse the body of poor Jack Fergie was slowly borne across the open country to Smooth Rock ranch.

"I have just had a message," said Parker to the little crowd that had assembled; "the coroner and the sheriff will be here in the morning. Meanwhile, this man must be detained on suspicion;" and he pointed to Fraser, who was standing by the Indian's side.

A howl of execration arose, and Fraser found himself surrounded by a throng of armed and angry men. In that moment of grief and excitement it might have gone hard with the unknown, defenceless youth had not Moose-jaw lifted his hand and demanded silence.

"Let wise men listen to what the stranger says, and let his words not be forgotten."

"Gentlemen," exclaimed Fraser, who was now put on his mettle, "I appeal to your sense of fair play and justice. I stand here alone and friend-

less, but I tell that man Parker to his face that if a murder has been committed, he, not I, is the murderer. I have no desire to escape—I only ask for justice.”

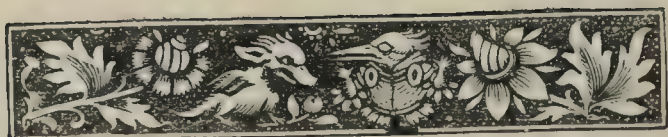
A murmur, half angry yet half approving, arose. Then Moose-jaw said quietly—

“I am responsible for this man’s keeping till the sheriff comes. Sir Roger here and Moose-jaw Jim will answer for him.”

“Let it be so,” said a voice out of the crowd. “But let them keep an eye on Parker too. It’s only fair.”

Then they all fell silent. Each man looked on his neighbour, and each was thinking of the young widow and the forlorn sister as they sat within and mourned their dead.





CHAPTER XIV.

SEVERED TIES.

THE High Pixley migration was fixed for an early date in April, berths having been secured for the entire party on board the first Allan liner that was to sail direct to Montreal that season. The date had been the subject of considerable discussion, and the arguments that bore upon it had been carefully considered. On the one hand, the emigrant party, by leaving England so early in the spring, was likely to be exposed to additional hardship from the severity of the long-lingering Canadian winter; but on the other hand, there was the advantage of taking time by the forelock, of being on the spot when the demand for spring labour became brisk, and before the great annual tide of emigration had set in. On the whole, the majority of the party consisting of active and healthy young people who had their way to make for themselves, a decision was come to in favour of an early start. However, to avoid the long rail journey from Halifax, where passengers have to be landed in winter, it was resolved to await the time

when the mighty St. Lawrence would be released from its "frozen chains" by the annual melting of the ice upon its surface.

When the time came for leaving Pixley, Hilda could not but experience some natural and inevitable regrets. She had known no other home ; and although she had been for some time back feverishly anxious to quit a place round which so many unpleasant associations had gathered, the last good-byes could not be said lightly or tearlessly.

The girl had been a little queen in the place, and had grown up to regard Pixley as peculiarly her own. And now she was to be deposed, or rather she had deliberately abdicated. She was to go forth a mere nobody into a distant land, there, amid strange scenes, to find new associates and fresh interests. Could it be done ? Would the tender roots that were now being torn up ever strike down again and take firm hold in a foreign soil ? Would there be any continuity between the new life and the old ? Could she remain herself through a change so great and all-affecting ? But then the question came, Did she want to remain herself ? Did she not just want to begin life anew upon some higher, or, at all events, different plane ? At Pixley she could never forget her folly. It was not only that every turn of the deep winding lanes and every woodland path were mixed up with the image of Richard Buckthorpe ; but worse than that was the morbidly haunting idea that she was being talked about, that people whispered that the rector's daughter had made a fool of herself running after the old squire's worthless nephew.

Still, it was not possible for the girl to tear herself away from the scenes amid which a happy childhood had been passed without regret. And that regret became more keen when, in saying good-bye, she discovered how the people loved her. It now occurred to her that she had altogether exaggerated the amount of talk that there might have been about her relations with Dick Buckthorpe, and that she had foolishly taken the old squire's cruel and bitter words as expressive of the general sentiment of the parish.

The most pathetic parting was that with Mrs. Marsh.

"Pixley won't be the same place without you my dear," said the old woman, as she looked lovingly into the bright, girlish face, the face of youth and energy and hope that is ever so sweet to the aged.

"Oh, don't say that," replied Hilda. "The new rector, Mr. Weston, is a very nice man, and he has got a wife and three grown-up daughters. Just fancy that! there will be quite a lot of them to run after you. They'll spoil you, Mrs. Marsh, between them, I know they will." Hilda Fairhope laughed; and indeed she experienced a secret satisfaction in the thought that no one was to succeed to her own unique position; hereafter the allegiance and love of her ex-subjects would be divided. There would be no sole queen of Pixley when she was gone.

"No doubt they will all be very kind—great folks mostly are as I have found them," assented Mrs. Marsh, with a sigh; "but old folk can't do with changes. My eyes are dim, and no face so sweet

as little Miss Hilda's will ever gladden them again. Why, miss, you've been coming into this cottage with your bright, winsome smile since ever you could toddle, ay, and before that, your dear mother used to bring you to see me. You've always had the next place in my heart to my own dear, lost child." And then the tears began to trickle slowly down the deep-worn channels in the patient face, slowly, because their fountain was almost dry, and the land where "there shall be no more crying" was no longer, for this way-worn traveller, a "land that is very far off."

"Tell me about her," said Hilda, taking the hand of her old friend. "Her name was Esther, was it not? and she went to Canada, where I am going. Perhaps, I shall meet her."

"Ah, just to think of that—to think that such a thing might be allowed by the good Lord," cried the old woman, eagerly. "But no," she continued, the dimness gathering on her face again; "Canada, they tell me, is a terrible big country, and it's not likely you would come across her. It was a foolish thought."

"Well, there is no knowing. Tell me were she lives, and I won't forget," said Hilda.

"They call the place Ontario—I believe that is the country or parish, as it might be—but the town where they go for letters is named Hamilton."

"Is she living with friends, then?"

"Friends indeed, because friends in need, they have been to her. But she went to them just as a servant, a hired servant, six years ago. He must be a good man, this Matthew Burrows of whom she

writes, and his wife must be a good woman too. Blessings on them both for the aid they have been to my poor child!"

There was a pause, and then Hilda said softly,—
'Is there anything else you would wish to tell me, in case—in case I should meet with Esther?"

"No, my dear," replied the old woman. Then she added, after a minutes' thought, "Only I wouldn't have you think too hardly of the child. Things were not as bad as I may have led you to think when we talked about this before. When my poor foolish child got to London, it seems that, by the mercy of God, a kind lady met her there—one who made it her business to be about the station in case there should be any young girls in need of help or advice. This angel of the dear Lord got hold of my wandering lamb and took her to a safe place. It seems the silly child was so ashamed and frightened that she wouldn't go home, and wouldn't tell them her name or where she came from. So when they had some young girls from the Home going out to Canada, they let her go along with them. And it was only after she had got comfortably settled down in her place that Mrs. Burrows persuaded Esther to write and tell me all about it. It was cruel to keep me so long in doubt, but I suppose the poor child didn't think of that."

"Perhaps that is how it has been with my brother Fraser," suggested Hilda.

"Likely as not, dear," answered the old woman, hopefully. "He was a good lad, and the Lord will not leave him. Maybe there will be good news to gladden the father's heart before you leave."

"I wish I could think so," sighed the girl. "We have waited day after day, week after week, month after month; and now we are leaving Pixley the day after to-morrow."

"So soon! you didn't speak as though it were to be quite so soon," exclaimed Mrs. Marsh.

"No," said Hilda, "I hadn't the courage to tell you all at once, and I didn't like to think of it myself."

And so good-bye—good-bye for ever in this world—was said. One more root was pulled up fresh and bleeding from the soil, and with heavy heart and tearful eyes Hilda trod for the last time the memorable path between Pixley Lane End and the rectory.

By the end of the week Pixley knew the Fairhopes no more, and Mr. Weston was already established in the rectory with an advance detachment of his large family.

As has been already said, Mr. Fairhope had found quite a new interest in advising and assisting those of his parishioners who had elected to accompany him across the Atlantic. What with matters of this sort and the arrangements necessary for winding up his personal affairs his time was fully occupied. His health improved, he had no leisure to repine, and even the protracted uncertainty as to Fraser's fate did not affect him so keenly as it would have done under ordinary circumstances.

For the first time, too, since the decease of the late Mrs. Fairhope, there was a sufficiency of money going in the household. Mr. Fairhope had received a good round sum for "fixtures" from his

successor, and the sale of stock, farm implements, furniture, etc., had realized more than was counted on. Donald and Cuthbert were both hopeful and helpful, and once the wrench of leaving Pixley was over Hilda rapidly recovered her spirits.

At Liverpool Mr. Fairhope found himself quite an important personage. Having brought so much grist to their mill, the Allan people treated him with great respect and allocated to him a commodious state-room and a desirable seat at the dinner table. Hilda and her brothers were likewise well cared for. Of the rest of the party, the Erdis family and two or three others travelled intermediate; but the majority were steerage. And so, upon a cold, bleak, windy day, the voyage commenced.

There was as usual a chaplain appointed by the S.P.C.K., but Mr. Fairhope had from the first agreed to divide the duties with him. Acting on the advice of Mr. Sharples, he had provided himself with a large quantity of literature. Friends from different parts of the country had sent him tracts, wholesome stories, magazines, temperance publications, etc., till he began to think that he was too well supplied, and that there might be some difficulty in getting the stock off his hands. But he experienced none, and during the last day or two of the voyage, matter that had been kept back as unsuitable or of deficient interest, was distributed and thankfully accepted. There were a number of Norwegians among the emigrants who, in their desire to learn English, were glad to receive *anything* printed in that language. The odd numbers of old parish magazines would serve

as lesson books—and, besides, there were the pictures in them. Thus Mr. Fairhope was fully occupied, and his now somewhat stooping figure became alike familiar and welcome among the emigrants.

But, though not without its compensations, the voyage, so early in the season, was a trying one. To begin with, it was too cold, even when it was not too rough, to hold any services on deck. There were no such delightful gatherings beneath the broad canopy of heaven as those at which poor Fraser had assisted, standing by Mr. Sharples's side. True, indeed, a number of meetings were held between decks, now in this quarter, now in that, but the space was circumscribed and the attendance necessarily limited. And at times the atmosphere as well as the motion of the ship was very trying to Mr. Fairhope. But being a brave man he stuck to his post, and was never heard to utter a word of complaint. Still, for her father's sake, Hilda was heartily thankful when the steamer entered the St. Lawrence. Mr. Fairhope seemed to have aged five years in twice as many days; and without being actually sea-sick, he had suffered during the latter part of the voyage from headache and loss of appetite.

Yes, for her father's sake, Hilda was glad when the voyage was fairly over; but for herself, she was quite sorry when the last day drew near. She had commenced by being very ill, and, with the exception of the brief respite at Moville, had been in misery for forty-eight hours. But having survived this ordeal, she was able to thoroughly enjoy herself during the rest of the voyage. Even upon

one excruciating day, when the number of saloon passengers at dinner was reduced from a normal hundred and twenty to thirty-seven, she turned up smiling, the sole representative of her family. Thus Miss Hilda became a personage, and whoever else might be slumberous, headachy, or ill at ease, she was always to be relied on for a chat or a song. Nor did she make herself disagreeable by airs of affected superiority, as so many "good sailors" are apt to do. While appreciating her own immunity, she could sympathize with the sufferer, and forebore to add to the miseries of others by loud assertions of how thoroughly she was enjoying herself!

Indeed, for two days the weather was so bad that to talk of "enjoyment" would be the merest brag. A gale of wind knocked everything topsyturvy for twenty hours; and even if a few boisterous spirits professed to find an element of fun in this, there could be no pretence of fun in what followed. The storm region having been escaped from, the steamer found herself in a dense fog and surrounded by floating ice. There was still a heavy swell, and the crunching and banging of the sheet ice as it was driven against the iron sides of the vessel were not pleasant to hear. Nor was it pleasant to listen, hour after hour, to the doleful wail of the fog-horn, as the anxious captain groped his way dead slow through the mist, not knowing what a moment might bring forth in the way of danger or catastrophe. All this time it was so intensely cold that to remain on deck for more than a few minutes was absolute torture for unseasoned passengers. Nothing but warmth

below, good fare and good fellowship could render life endurable under such circumstances.

The afternoon of a miserable day was just closing in, and Hilda, already pierced through with cold after a five minutes' promenade on the saloon deck, was about to seek shelter below, when she encountered the captain.

"You are a fine sailor, Miss Fairhope, but you must not stay up here too long, or you'll get a chill," cried the officer, cheerfully.

"I have discovered that, and am trying to get below. But it is not so thick as it was a few minutes ago, is it, captain?" replied Hilda.

"No; I'm thankful to say it is clearing, and if you could stand the cold for a bit longer you might get your first glance of America."

"Oh, that would be jolly! and are we really so near land?"

"We may be too near it, and that is just where the danger lies," explained the captain. "According to my reckoning we ought to be six or eight miles to the south-west of Cape Race. But we have not been able to get an observation for three days, and it is hard to make proper allowance for the set of the currents in these parts. I shall lie to in a quarter of an hour." Then, suddenly seizing the girl's arm, he cried, "See, see there—that dark patch right above where the boat is swinging! and it's not a mile off either, as I'm a living man."

The captain was already on the bridge, and Hilda found herself alone, clinging to the wet, cold rail that guarded the deck and peering through the mist in the direction that had been indicated. Then she heard the cry, repeated from the look-

out who stood, clad in oilskins, at the ship's bow—

“Land a-head on the starboard bow!”

Instantly the bell rang in the engine-room, and the speed of the steamer was yet futher checked.

Even as Hilda gazed on the dark blotch that the captain had pointed out to her, the mist divided, rose, and rolled away to the southward. There, full in front and not now a clear mile away lay the extreme point of Cape Race, while the land that had been first sighted on the starboard bow was yet nearer. The idea of danger had never once occurred to Hilda throughout the voyage. The rolling of the vessel had been disagreeable, the crunching of the ice irritating, and the moan of the fog-horn depressing; but none of these things had suggested the possibility of a catastrophe. But now the sudden vision of those dark, cruel rocks starting up from the surface of the angry sea, sent a thrill through the girl's whole frame. She thought of the captain's words, and asked herself if a quarter of an hour might not have been too late had the fog not lifted.

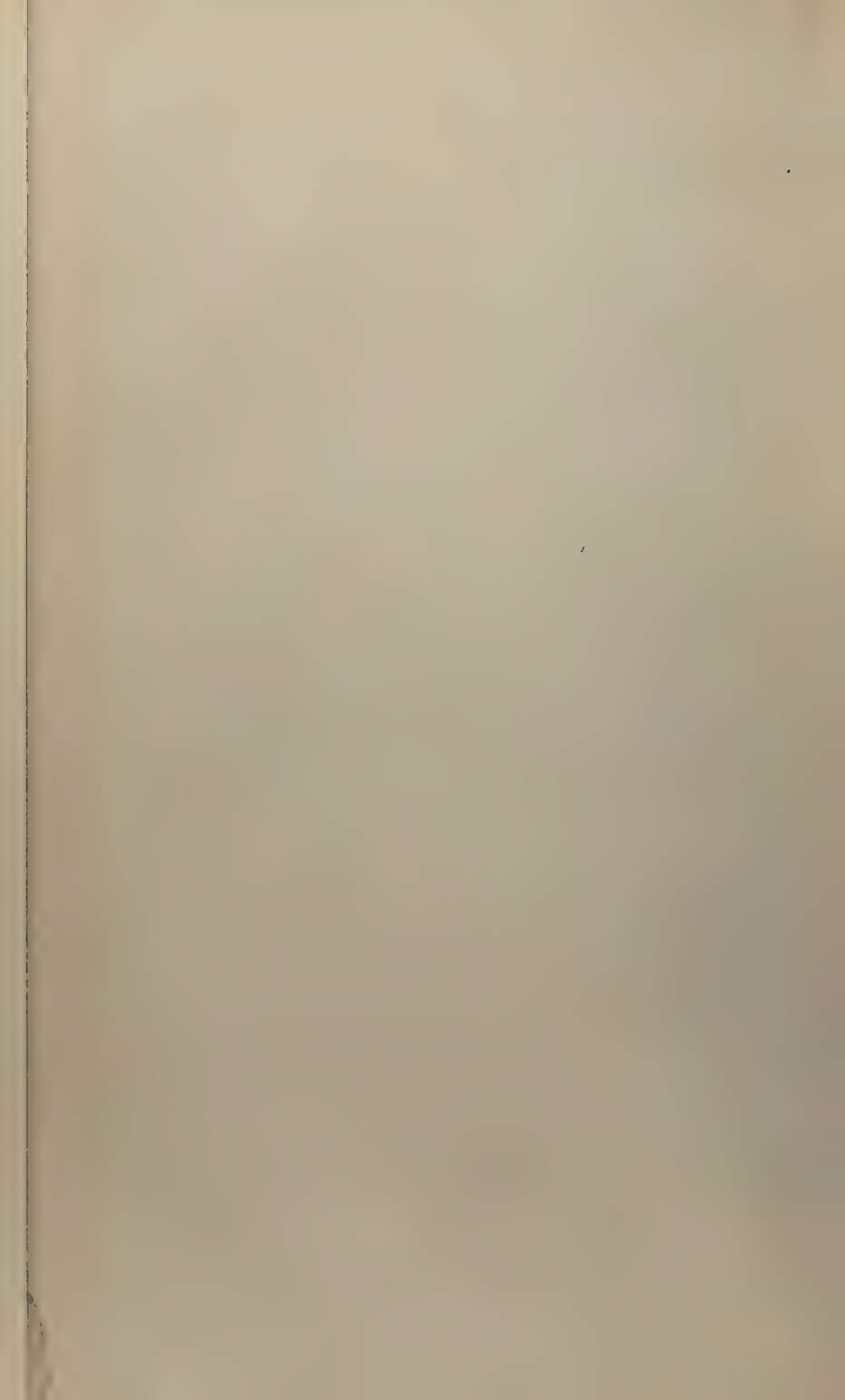
“I suppose this is your first veiw of the great American continent, Miss Fairhope? To be a land of promise for so many, it looks sufficiently bleak and repellant.”

The voice was close behind her, and, still holding the rail by one hand, and her eyes being still full of the tears that sudden excitement had brought to them, Hilda turned to see who the speaker might be. It was a Mr. Lynton who sat opposite her at table, and with whom she had conversed casually throughout the voyage.



"I SUPPOSE THIS IS YOUR FIRST VIEW OF THE GREAT AMERICAN CONTINENT,
MISS FAIRHOPE?"

Page 162.



"Yes, it is my first view, and it is near enough and sudden enough to be sufficiently startling," replied Hilda, conscious that Mr. Lynton had noted the signs of emotion on her face.

"Oh, there is no danger now"—and Hilda was struck by the gravity of the speaker—"even if the fog were to come down again; the captain has got his position, and fortunately the sea has moderated."

"Then you think there has been danger?"

"There is always danger at sea, though people have got so accustomed to the regularity of the great Atlantic liners that they cease to think of it. They forget that their safety depends, not only on the elements, but on the forethought, integrity, courage, watchfulness of quite a number of men. It is a great battle, and a battle that may be lost by the failure or unfitness of one individual."

"I suppose if we had gone any further in the fog we might have been on the rocks at this moment?" said Hilda.

"Yes, *if* we had. But probably the captain knew his position to within a few miles. He would have gone dead slow, and stopped altogether if he could not make out the land. The skill of such men is marvellous. When I crossed to the old country the first time, we ran six days without getting an observation, the weather was so thick all the time. The last day the captain said to us after dinner, 'Well, gentlemen, I calculate I shall have run my course by nine o'clock to-night; so if we don't make land before that I shall have to stop the engines and lie to.' Well, at half-past eight the light was discovered on Tory Island.

After a run, in the dark as you may say, of three thousand miles the ship was not five miles out of her estimated position."

Hilda told Mr. Lynton what the captain had said to her so shortly before. "But even a quarter of an hour might have been too late," she added.

"It might have been a close shave," admitted Mr. Lynton, glancing at the rocks that were now slipping past on the starboard side. "Despite all skill and all precautions accidents will happen."

"What an awful thing a shipwreck must be!" said Hilda, thinking aloud rather than addressing her companion; "it is not only the danger to one's self, but to be brought, in a moment it may be, face to face with the agony and terror of others."

"It *is* an awful thing—how awful those know who have experienced it," assented Mr. Lynton, gravely.

"Have *you* had some such experience, then?" inquired the girl, eagerly.

"Yes; I can say, like St. Paul, 'A night and a day I have been in the deep.' But now, Miss Fairhope, you must really come below. Why, you are shivering and almost frozen."

"I think it is rather too cold to stay on deck any longer. But I want to hear about your shipwreck," said Hilda, who was conscious, however, of a vague inclination to remain where she was and in her present company.

"Certainly, I shall be pleased to tell the story of my one adventure, but it must be by-and-by or to-morrow. Now, you must come and let me get you a cup of afternoon tea. Take my arm, won't

you? The deck is slippery and the roll of the ship has increased."

So saying he conveyed her carefully and safely below. Then he got their tea at the hands of an interested and sympathetic steward. After that they had a cosy chat and the thawing process set rapidly in.





CHAPTER XV.

ON THE ST. LAWRENCE.

AT Quebec the steamer was, as usual, relieved of the greater part of her human freight. The immigrants went ashore and were despatched in the fashion we have already described, the little party from Pixley being included in the throng.

Here too, at Quebec, a somewhat mournful family parting took place. The Fairhopes had originally intended to proceed with their band of followers direct to the already selected place of settlement on the distant Saskatchewan, *vid* Calgary and Edmonton; but the plan had to be modified on account of Mr. Fairhope's health. The ship's doctor, who had acted throughout like an old friend of the family, absolutely insisted that the old gentleman should take some days for rest before venturing a long journey on the cars. Moreover, a brief communication received from James Fairhope at Liverpool, spoke of Montreal as the probable place of meeting between the long-separated brothers. So it was decided that the two young men should go forward with the

immigrants, while Hilda and her father proceeded in the steamer to Montreal.

There was a special charm about the Sunday aspect of the steamer wending her placid way over the smooth, broad surface of the St. Lawrence towards the picturesque Canadian capital. The main decks were clear, and at early dawn they had been scrubbed down in the searching and masterly style that characterizes the charring operations of the sailor. On the other hand, the saloon deck was crowded—the sun and the smooth water combined having the effect of bringing forth quite a number of passengers, who had been scarcely visible, if at all, since leaving the Mersey.

But Hilda could not enjoy the scene. The majority of the first-class passengers were in a congratulatory state of mind, both on having the ship to themselves and on being so close to the end of their voyage. But to Hilda, who had been much about among the steerage folk, the aspect of the clean-washed decks, with just here and there a group of two or three whispering together, was very depressing. She missed her brothers and also those humbler friends, with many of whom she had been familiar since childhood. Now for the first time she felt herself really cut adrift from the old country, and from the associations and associates of the years that could never be lived again. A sense of desolation, timidity, and gloomy foreboding came over her. It was a new sensation to the hitherto high-spirited, self-reliant girl, and she was puzzled by it.

Hilda was also very anxious about her father. He was depressed and ill, so much so that kindly

Dr. N—— put a veto on his undertaking even a short morning service. Consequently, the S.P.C.K. chaplain having gone West with a party of lads for Winnipeg, there was no clergyman available. The doctor, however, read prayers; he also—and this he was in the habit of doing—played the harmonium. Still, Hilda did not like to think of her father being put aside, the more so since she knew how much he would be fretted by his deposition. Try as she might, the day did not feel like Sunday; and she was irritated rather than cheered by the almost boisterous spirits of her fellow-voyagers.

Struggling, though feebly, against her depression and fears, Hilda was pacing the deck alone when a familiar voice startled her.

“Good morning, Miss Fairhope. I’ve been wondering what had become of you.”

She turned quickly and saw Mr. Lynton, who stood evidently hoping to receive a friendly greeting.

“Mr. Lynton! I thought you had left us at Quebec. You said good-bye last evening.”

“And I am the happier for being here to say good morning to-day. The fact is, I changed my mind at the last moment. Letters—news received at Quebec decided me. I am going to Montreal. You don’t mind, I hope?”

“Mind! of course not. I am very glad—that is, it is pleasant to have some friends left on board. You see, I miss my brothers terribly, and my father is far from well, and—and——” She had begun by being amused at his evident embarrassment, and now a similar feeling checked her own utterance.

"And perhaps I may be of some little use to you? I think you said you had no friends in Montreal."

"No, we shall be absolute strangers; only there is the possibility of uncle meeting us, as I told you."

"Have you decided where to stop?" was the next question.

"Well, we had thought of the St. Lawrence Hall. The Windsor seems rather grand for us," replied Hilda.

"Yes," assented Lynton, slowly. "Or, if you were going to be more than a night or two, I might recommend you to a private hotel or boarding-house, where your father would be nice and quiet. You see, I know Montreal very well, having spent several years there when I was a student at McGill University."

"Thank you very much," said Hilda, brightening up. "I am sure that would be the best plan. I think my father ought to have several days' rest before undertaking a long journey. Don't you, Mr. Lynton?"

"I am sure of it—several days; besides, there is a good deal to see in Montreal. It is a beautiful city, and I should enjoy showing you both round a bit. You know we have a mountain at Montreal, and vastly proud of it we are."

The lightness with which the last part of this speech was delivered did not blind her to the brief gravity with which he had replied to the question as to her father's need of rest.

"I am afraid my dear father is far from well. He would not have given up taking the service

this morning if he could possibly have helped it. I almost think he is in for an illness."

"Oh, you must not alarm yourself, dear Miss Fairhope," he urged. "He is not a young man, and the voyage has knocked him up. A few days on *terra firma* may do wonders. I hope your uncle will turn up; it would be a great comfort."

And so they talked for an hour, and through all there was, on his part, a tenderness almost amounting to compassion, that set the girl wondering. Perhaps the tenderness pure and simple would not have been so wonderful, but it was the pity showing through it all that puzzled her. "Ah," she said to herself, "he thinks me a poor, helpless creature, sure to be frightened in a strange country, and totally unfit to fight for myself or to look after anybody else." Then she tried to feel angry and to vow that she would "show him to the contrary." But somehow she did not make much of that, and besides, it was quite evident that he was very far from regarding her as a fool or a weakling. More than once he spoke of her "courage" and "helpfulness," and yet through all there was the glance of pity and the tone of commiseration. She could not make it out, and after a while she gave up trying. She ceased to fuss and worry herself. With Mr. Lynton's assistance she established her father comfortably on a deck-chair, and watched him as he dropped off into a quiet sleep. Then she and Mr. Lynton resumed their walk till, later on in the afternoon, he pointed across the low-lying country and the great sweeps of the river to where the "mountain" stood out against the clear horizon.

"There lies Montreal—the royal mount, as the first French settlers named it. We shall arrive about five o'clock," he said quietly, as they leant for a little against the rail at the forward end of the upper deck.

"And then our voyage will be over," she added, with a perhaps unconscious sigh.

"And then you will let me take you—you and your father—for a drive round the mount. It's the thing to do at Montreal, and really the view is beautiful."

"I should like it very much. It is very kind of you," she said simply.

"Do you know, Miss Fairhope," he resumed, after a slight pause, "it was just here that you were standing, and in just your present attitude, when you got that first glimpse of the new world."

"And when you so encouragingly described it as a bleak-looking land of promise for us poor emigrants," she replied, with a faint smile.

"It was a stupid thing of me to say," he admitted, "but then Newfoundland is not the North-West; indeed, it is not America at all. Somebody has said that if America had been discovered from the other side, these bleak western shores would never have been inhabited by white men at all. But you will find a glorious country where you are going. And need I say that you will have Frank Lynton's best wishes for your individual happiness as well as for the success of your family experiment?"

"Do you know the north-west at all?" inquired Hilda, rather abruptly.

"I have been through a good deal of the coun-

try, and I am thinking of settling in Winnipeg, or perhaps of going farther across the mountains into British Columbia. You know I am a lawyer."

"I can't say I did," said Hilda, with surely unnecessary candour. Then she added quickly, "I should not have thought there was much for lawyers to do in a new country."

"Well, not so much as in an old one. But even in the land of promise people will fall out and have their disagreements. There is some crime too——" He stopped so suddenly that Hilda looked at him in surprise. Then he quickly resumed, "But what I wanted to say to you, Miss Fairhope, was that I hope you will not feel *quite* alone in Montreal. I shall be proud and happy if ever you need a——"

"I am not very likely to need a lawyer," interrupted the girl, somewhat ungraciously.

He looked at her reproachfully as he answered gravely—

"I was about to say, a *friend*, Miss Fairhope, and I will adhere to that simple word, if I may."

"Oh, certainly," she answered hastily, "and I hope you will not think me rude in what I said. But I think I had better go to my father now; he is awake, I see, and may wish to go below." And so she turned and left him.

Frank Lynton felt decidedly snubbed, and he also felt not a little bewildered. What had been the cause of Hilda's sudden change of manner? Had he said anything to annoy her? if so, he could not recall what it was. She had always been friendly with him—latterly, he hoped, something more than friendly. And now, when he was full of

a yearning desire to do her service, she had turned from him abruptly and had by anticipation almost repudiated him as a helper. What could it all mean? The masculine heart could not solve the mystery; and accordingly, as Frank Lynton resumed his now solitary walk on the deck, he felt both puzzled and hurt—nay, he was almost angry.

And what was poor Hilda Fairhope doing a few feet below him? Having seen to her father's comfort she had returned to her "state-room" and was lying, with her face hidden between her hands, on the couch beneath the open port, through which a pleasant, if somewhat chilly, breeze was now blowing. Could Mr. Lynton have known how miserable Hilda Fairhope was, it might have had a soothing effect upon him as he paced up and down over her head, trying manfully to reason himself back into a temper of "sweet reasonableness" and forbearance. Yes, Hilda was miserable—and she was bewildered too. During the last days of the voyage she had been on friendly and perfectly easy terms with Frank Lynton. He had not made any attempt to flirt with her, and she had come to regard him as though he had been an old friend. But on that Sunday morning everything had changed. It was as though the man had assumed a sort of quiet protectorate over her. What did it mean? At first she had said to herself, it was merely that he pitied her, now left alone with her invalid father. Yet soon her woman's instinct told her that there must be something else behind. Why should she stand in need of his pity, as though she were a mere child or an imbecile? But a day before, and he had treated her judgment with respect—nay, he had

left the impression as though he had thought her very competent to take care, not merely of herself but of her entire family. If secretly flattered, she had also been a little hurt by the light esteem in which she suspected him of holding the capacity of her "menkind." But now apparently he craved to soothe and pet her, as though she were some stricken, wounded, helpless creature. Why should his behaviour have thus suddenly changed? After the first passing irritation, something assured her that it was not that he despised or thought her weak. Was it that he loved her? It was the occurrence of that question that had caused her apparent ungraciousness. She did not know whether to be glad or sorry; she was frightened, and her immediate thought had been to check any further advances. It was not that she did not like him. Frank Lynton had shown himself an intelligent, straightforward, earnest man—one to whom any woman might safely entrust her happiness and her life. He was just the sort of man, too, that Hilda Fairhope would be drawn towards, and, in fact, the suspicion that he admired and cared for her had sent a thrill of delight through the girl's whole soul and body.

Why, then, was Hilda so sad, and why were the tears forcing a passage through the fingers that pressed her burning eyes? Alas, it was because the image of the worthless scamp who had played with her youthful innocence was all too deeply stamped on her memory. It was Dick Buckthorpe—handsome, clever, cynical—who had come and stood unbidden between her and Frank Lynton. Was it possible that she still loved this man? Or was

it so that she had ever really loved him? A few days ago she would have answered unhesitatingly that her ignorant, childish fancy had been utterly unworthy of the name of love, and that whatever her regard had been, it had absolutely ceased to exist when her unworthy idol was dethroned. But now what could she say? Why had this wretched episode of her old-world life forced itself upon her? Yet, after all, did she wish to forget it? Might not strange eventualities be hidden in the future? What was she to Richard Buckthorpe, and what was he to her? And what was she to Frank Lynton? And what *might* he have been to her? The questions coursed and re-coursed through her weary mind; and they ever seemed to advance and retreat rythmically to the sound of the steady tramp of some one who paced and re-paced the deck above.





CHAPTER XVI.

KINDLY ATTENTIONS.



AFTER one night spent at the St. Lawrence Hall, Hilda and her father moved into a quiet, private hotel to which Mr. Lynton had introduced them.

A few days passed pleasantly enough in sight-seeing. Montreal is one of the fairest towns in the British Empire. Standing by the quay-side—the levee, as it is locally called—you could hardly realize that you were several hundred miles from the sea, for you behold a harbour full of shipping of every sort, including the ocean-going steamers of the Allan, Dominion, Beaver, and other lines. But elsewhere the appearance is that of an inland town. The main streets for the most part run parallel to the river, rising in terraces behind one another towards the mountain which forms a picturesque, well-wooded background to the entire town. Montreal is a city of churches—every “denomination” and every style of architecture being fully represented. It is also a city of trees and gardens—though when Hilda Fairhope saw it first, the long-lingering winter had but recently

passed away, and the tender buds and foliage were only beginning to peep forth.

One day the little party went by rail to Lachine and returned by steamer down the famous rapids. This trip Hilda enjoyed very much, and for the first time since landing on Canadian soil she felt at her ease with Frank Lynton, as they stood together and watched the raging, boiling waves through which and down the confused slopes of which the steamer, navigated with consummate skill, reeled and plunged, avoiding by what seemed but a handbreadth, the huge rocks that beset the tortuous channel on either hand.

Another pleasant morning was given to the mountain, and on this occasion Mr. Fairhope seemed to be brighter and stronger than he had been since leaving England. It was a charming drive, and one which Hilda could never forget. Having ascended by a series of broken gradients from the lower part of the town, the carriage, after a scramble on the steep slope of Simpson Street, gained the beautifully shaded road that leads by many windings to the summit, which rises seven hundred feet above the city. Here a halt was made, and while Mr. Fairhope remained in the carriage, Hilda, accompanied by Mr. Lynton, dismounted and walked forward a little way in order to obtain the best view of the city lying amid its gardens in a bright, pleasingly variegated streak between the wooded slopes of the mountain and the sun-illuminated face of the majestic river.

"Do you prefer this view or that from the citadel at Quebec?" inquired Lynton, after they had surveyed the prospect in silence for a while.

"I can scarcely say," replied Hilda ; "the river at Quebec is far more beautiful than here, and there is an air of quiet strength and antique majesty about the whole scene that impresses one. And yet the view at our feet—with all those gardens, and picturesque houses, and spires, and detached buildings, and, beyond, the grand river and the big steamers, that seem as if they had lost their way in wandering so far inland—is very lovely. I have not seen much of the world, of course, but I cannot imagine a more beautiful city than Montreal."

Miss Fairhope was not wont to make long or poetical speeches, and since landing she had been specially reticent in her intercourse with Frank Lynton. She now stopped abruptly when she became conscious of her companion's eyes fixed on her.

"It is all very beautiful," he said quietly. "These few days have been happy ones for me ; and I trust they have proved restful and beneficial to—to—your father—and you."

"My father is certainly better ; but I am not aware that there was much the matter with me," replied the girl, in the reserved manner that she had schooled herself to. Then she added apologetically, "All the same, I have enjoyed the rest and the sight-seeing immensely. And you have been most kind and attentive, Mr. Lynton."

He looked at her gratefully, but did not seem to wish to say anything ; so she resumed—

"The only drawback has been not hearing from Uncle James. I fear it frets my father a good deal."

"There may be a letter any day. I have inquired at the post-office nearly every morning."

"That is very good of you, Mr. Lynton. I don't know why you should take so much trouble about us."

"No trouble at all, I assure you," he replied in conventional form. "But perhaps your father will be tired waiting. Shall we go back?"

Hilda Fairhope bit her lip. Just when she had allowed herself to soften, when some impulse within had forced words of gratitude to her lips and glances of gratitude to her eyes, he had put her aside with coldness and repelled her advances.

"Yes, we certainly had better go back to the carriage. We have been here too long," she assented quite snappishly.

Hilda was the more likely to remember that day when they had driven round the mountain, because it was the last day for many a weary week that held in it any brightness for her.

On the drive home Mr. Fairhope appeared drowsy and exhausted; before midnight he was prostrated with an alarming attack of illness. When Frank Lynton called next morning it was to find that Hilda had been up all night, that the doctor had been in attendance, and that Mr. Fairhope's life was even now hanging by a thread.

"And I was in such spirits as I came along because I had good news for you," said the young man, venturing to retain Hilda's hand a moment in his own warm grasp.

"Good news, Mr. Lynton?"

"Yes; your uncle is in Montreal. I met an old Hudson Bay man who knows him well, and he

says he is quite sure he saw him yesterday. I am safe to come on him by-and-by, either at the St. Lawrence Hall, or at the Allan Office, where he is certain to be making inquiries about you."

"My poor father will be so glad!" and the girl's eyes were full of tears as she spoke. "He has been going on about James and my dear mother all night, and since he has been more conscious this morning he has asked half a dozen times if there was any news."

"You must break it to him gently," said Lynton. "Tell him that his brother has been heard of and is expected—that he will see him very soon, or something like that. You know how to put it."

Two days of intense anxiety ensued. Mr. Fairhope, whose seizure had been of an apoplectic nature, completely recovered his senses, but owing to extreme weakness and a sharp bronchial attack his condition remained precarious. He was perpetually talking about his brother and demanding when he was to arrive. And poor Hilda, trying to soothe him, got involved in a series of fibs which became more complicated and daring as the time went on. From hour to hour she awaited with beating heart the result of Mr. Lynton's inquiries.

On the evening of the second day, Hilda, looking out from the verandah for the twentieth time, perceived Frank Lynton coming up the street. Another man was with him, and they seemed to be involved in grave and earnest talk together. Yet a few moments later Lynton entered the room with a smiling face.

"Allow me to introduce your uncle to you, Miss

Fairhope, and an old friend and benefactor of mine he turns out to be too."

A tall, weather-bronzed old man advanced and took both Hilda's hands in his, exclaiming—

"My brother's child—Nina's child. God bless you, my sweet girl." So saying, he drew her forward and kissed her tenderly on the forehead.

"Oh, my dear father will be so glad to see you! He never ceases asking when you are coming. You know—Mr. Lynton has told you, I suppose—that he is very ill. But, please God, he will be better now that you are come, uncle," exclaimed Hilda, eagerly.

"Ay, that's it, my girl. "We'll put new life into him and cheer him up. Why, he is four years younger than I am—a mere boy compared to me. And I don't think I'm quite done yet. Now run and tell him his scamp of a brother Jim is here; and then, if he's ready, I'll follow when you give me the word, missie." There was an affectation of roughness in the old man's manner, and yet his voice shook with emotion that he was evidently hard set to restrain.

As soon as Hilda had left the room the two men sat down and looked at each other.

"This is a bad business. I can't believe it," said James Fairhope, gravely.

"Of course you can't believe that your nephew—that Miss Fairhope's brother—is a murderer. But none the less, he lies under the accusation, and, judging by the newspaper accounts, the case against him looks black enough. You don't know, sir, what tortures I have suffered and what trouble I have been at to prevent his father or sister hearing

anything about this or seeing it in the papers. I am so glad that I came on you, and that I shall now have you to support me."

"What do you propose to do?" asked James Fairhope.

"Well, we must break the matter to Hilda—that is, to Miss Fairhope. Then, with her permission and yours, I shall be off to the north-west to see what is being done, and to undertake the poor fellow's defence myself, if necessary. There is not a day to be lost, for the trial comes off next week. But till you turned up, I could not bear to leave them—that dear girl and her father—alone."

"You have known about this extraordinary affair for some time, then?" remarked the old man.

"Yes, since we arrived at Quebec. I chanced to take up a paper there, and my eye was caught by the name Fairhope—not a common one, as you know. The other two young fellows had talked a lot about their 'pioneer brother' Fraser, and I was horrified to find that this was the very man who was suspected of the murder about which all the north-west was talking. I was to have landed at Quebec, but I at once determined to go on to Montreal in the hope that I might be of some help to—to—Mr. Fairhope and his daughter. I knew too that they were expecting you to meet them, and I wished to consult you as to what was to be done."

James Fairhope leant back in his chair with his hands in his pockets, contemplating the enthusiastic young lawyer with an amused smile.

"Ah, 'twas ever so—'twas ever so," he murmured

to himself, then adding in a louder tone, "I am sure, sir, the family must be for ever indebted to you for your kind interest in their affairs."

"Common humanity, sir! The brothers had gone west before I saw that wretched newspaper paragraph. And could I leave a sick old man and a young, inexperienced girl to the chance of hearing such terrible news when they landed in a new country?"

The old man continued to smile. "Do not apologize, my dear friend. I admire your humanity. There is a great deal of human nature about. I might have done the same at your age."

Frank Lynton flushed up and said quickly, "I do not want to conceal from you, Mr. Fairhope, that I love your niece. I think I loved her all along; but I knew that I worshipped her when I saw this black cloud impending. But she does not return my love. She is cold and often distant. I do not understand her; perhaps there is some one else."

Just at this moment the door opened and Hilda glided in.

"Father has been asleep, but he is awake now and would like to see you, uncle. He is very weak, and you will not mind if he says anything unreasonable or strange. Remember that he loves you very dearly, although you have been so long estranged and separated."

"The fault was mine, dear child—together mine. I will tell you about it some day. Now, let me go and ask my brother's pardon. I have been a foolish, headstrong man, but God has, I trust, forgiven me. George will do so too; he was

always a good fellow, George. Ah, that is the door. I will go in alone while you return and say a civil word to Lynton. You do not know what a splendid fellow he is."

In this way Hilda had no choice but to re-enter the sitting-room where poor Frank Lynton was endeavouring to recover from the confusion into which her abrupt entrance had thrown him.

"So you and my uncle have met before, Mr. Lynton? at least I think you spoke of him just now as your friend—friend and benefactor." She spoke quite calmly and with the formality of one who addresses another in the ordinary intercourse of "polite society."

"That is so," was the equally grave and restrained response. "I recognized in your uncle the man who had saved my life. I told you once that I had been shipwrecked. It was on Lake Superior. The water is terribly cold, and also being fresh it is hard to swim in. Somehow I managed to reach a rock some little distance from the northern shore. There I lay exhausted, and there I would have perished and been frozen stiff had not a man seen me from the shore. He had no canoe or boat, but he pushed off with a log of timber and came to my rescue. It is but six years ago, so you will understand that he was not a young man. As for me, I was but little more than a boy. The man dried me, rubbed me warm, fed me, sheltered me, clothed me. In three or four days we parted; I never knew his name, never saw him again till we met at the Allan Office this afternoon. So I think, Miss Fairhope, I was justified in using the word benefactor."

"Yes, indeed," said the girl, warmly. "The story is quite romantic. And to think that you should have been spared to repay the debt—to the family at least, if not exactly to uncle himself—by your kindness, your *great* kindness, to us."

"Do not speak of that, Miss Fairhope. As I said to your uncle just now, I have done no more than common humanity demanded——"

"Common humanity!" she interrupted scornfully; "what an extraordinary expression. Uncle must have been obliged to you. But we were not *quite* helpless or *quite* paupers."

"Excuse my blundering words, Miss Fairhope," exclaimed the young man, colouring. "I am stupid, but perhaps not just so stupid as you imagine. Let us part friends, as we have to say good-bye."

"To say good-bye! Why, where are you going to—and when?" she cried.

"I am going west by the Canadian Pacific Railway train to-night."

"Is this a sudden determination? You never breathed a word of it before," she said reproachfully.

"Sudden and not sudden. I had determined to go—to go about my business—as soon as ever your uncle turned up."

"Then *we* have kept you—common humanity has kept you—from attending to your own business all this time."

"Not exactly. The business could wait a few days, but it can wait no longer. I must start to-night. And just one thing, dear Miss Fairhope—one thing, even if we should never meet again—you will know more about this business of mine by-and-by."

"Why cannot I know something about it now, then?" broke in a soft, pleading voice.

"Because you are and ought to be fully occupied with your father. But your uncle will explain matters later on, and then perhaps you will think more kindly of me. You will do justice to my motives, even though you cannot forgive my awkwardness and presumption. Good-bye." And he held out his hand.

"I do not understand you. You must not leave me thus. You have been so good—so kind." And she sprang forward impetuously and caught his proffered hand between both her own.

He looked at her. One moment there flashed a light into his earnest eyes. Then he pressed her right hand and freed himself. He answered gravely—

"I am not sure that I understand you either, Miss Fairhope. Still, it is good-bye—good-bye *for the present*, let us say."

"Ah, that is better. Good-bye, Mr. Lynton—good-bye, till we meet again."

And, with the words ringing in his ears, he hurried from the house, not trusting himself to speak another word, but saying to himself the while that he had scarce time left in which to catch the great trans-continental train.





CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE ONCE "LONE LAND."

TIME and money being both precious, the High Pixley party had travelled through to their distant destination with as little delay as possible. There was the greater part of a day at Montreal, and several hours at Winnipeg; but with these exceptions, the journey was made right through to Calgary, almost at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, without a break. Donald and Bert were the acknowledged chiefs of the expedition, and while the latter supplied an unfailing fund of energy and light-heartedness, the former developed quite unexpected capacities as a leader of men. He was quiet, thoughtful, sympathetic, and seemed to have put himself quite, as a matter of course, at everybody's beck and call.

The train was late at Calgary, not arriving till about four in the morning. This was, however, an advantage rather than otherwise for people who did not want to be at the expense of going to an hotel, since it shortened the time of waiting for the branch-line train to Edmonton, which started at eight o'clock. The members of the party put in

the four hours as best they could. Some fell asleep in the waiting-room ; some made their way to one or other of the second-class saloons and small hotels that have been run up near the depôt, there to seek refreshment if not repose ; others formed parties and started off to explore the neighbourhood. As for the Fairhope brothers, they wandered about the silent streets till the people at the "Alberta" showed signs of waking up, then they went into the hotel and ordered breakfast.

"Did you hear the beastly row they made at that place where we stopped so long in the middle of the night—about an hour or two before we got here? What was it all about?" inquired Bert of one of the young Pixley farmers, whom he found sitting beside him at the breakfast-table.

"I understand they were taking a prisoner aboard, a chap that is suspected of murdering an Englishman who has a ranch out that way."

"What a beastly shame! You'd think there were few enough people in a big country like this, without killing any of them off. Did you hear the fellow's name?"

"The murdered man was called Fregus or Fergie, or some such name as that. But nobody seems to know much about the prisoner ; they say he is a tramp or an itinerant gambler."

"I never woke at all—never even knew when the train stopped," said Donald.

"Oh, nothing ever disturbs you ; you've got too good a conscience—*mens conscia recti*, and that sort of thing," laughed Bert. "But, I say, isn't it nigh time for the train, boys? Oughtn't we to be going?"

"Well, we've had a ripping good breakfast ; and, say, aren't those young ladies that have been waiting on us just stunners !" exclaimed the young farmer, as he rose from his seat.

"They tell me they get sixty pounds a year, with board and lodging," said Donald, who had developed a mania for making economical and statistical inquiries about the country.

"My ! one of them would be worth looking after. But it might be a bit rough for such fashionable folk out where we are going." And sighing at this reflection, the young fellow left the room, followed by the Fairhopes.

"Say, Bertha, does the tallest of those chaps remind you of any one ?" inquired one of the young ladies, who had made so favourable an impression, of her friend.

"He might be twin brother to that fellow we had here—last week was, it ?—him with the queer name," was the prompt reply.

"That's the man—Fair something. Fairbrother, Fairweather—no, Fairhope was the name."

"Ah," exclaimed the young lady who had been addressed as Bertha, "I believe that is the very man they have taken for the murder of poor young Fergie. He arrived by the train this morning. Perhaps you and I may have to give evidence, Miss Black."

"I'll have nothing to say. He was *your* friend," retorted Miss Black, tossing her head.

"Well, he wasn't half bad, though a bit weak perhaps. As for killing any one, he wouldn't be so cruel. I'm not ashamed to say I thought him a nice young fellow."

And so the light-hearted maidens chatted together, while Donald, Bert, and the others hurried to board the train.

The length of the recently constructed line, from Calgary to the hitherto remote settlement of Edmonton, on the Saskatchewan, is about two hundred miles, and the tri-weekly train, travelling in leisurely fashion, occupies an entire day in the journey. The country traversed is by no means so monotonously flat as the prairie region of Manitoba. For one thing, the gleaming, snow-clad peaks of the Rockies form for some time a glorious background for the rolling grass lands on the left-hand side. Further on there are lakes and patches of timber, and the surface of the land is pleasingly diversified and undulating. Red Deer, where passengers stop to dine, is the centre of a magnificent country, which, since the advent of the railway, is being rapidly opened up for settlement. Indeed, the whole district from here to the Saskatchewan is evidently fitted for colonization and for farming of the "mixed" character.

It was evening when the train reached Edmonton, and it seemed to the Fairhopes and their band of followers as though they might have been arriving at an out-of-the-way village in the old country. In front of the large hotel which the railway company has put up close to the depôt, groups of men were lounging and laughing together as they watched and cheered the efforts of a lot of young fellows, who were engaged in an extemporized game of football on the wide, straight roadway that has been cut through the trees and scrub.

"I say, I call this a jolly place! It looks like home, doesn't it, Don? We must get up a football team as soon as we are settled," exclaimed Bert, enthusiastically.

"Yes, it is hard to believe that we are six thousand miles away from England," replied the elder brother.

"But where is the town, Mr. Fairhope? There seems to be nothing about here, only this hotel and two or three shops," said one of the party.

It was then explained to the new arrivals that Edmonton itself lay a mile and a half away at the other side of the river. They might either cross thither by the ferry or remain in the neighbourhood of the depôt for the night, finding shelter in tents or in some of the wooden shanties that stood about. The Canadian Pacific Railway hotel could scarcely accommodate so large a number, and the cost would also be a serious consideration. Finally it was decided that the majority should remain where they were while the Fairhopes and two or three others went into the town to make inquiries, and to present a letter of introduction with which Donald had been furnished by Mr. Sharples.

The great Saskatchewan river pursues its tortuous course at the bottom of a deep ravine, which it has ploughed out for itself in the lapse of ages. The sides of the ravine are in many places so abrupt, that the river remains unobserved till the traveller is close upon it. The town of Edmonton is situated about a hundred feet above the rushing stream, which is at this place some three hundred yards wide. It would require something more than the present traffic to make a bridge across

such a gap as that a paying concern. So the railway remains on the right bank of the river, and as it will not go to the town, the town will no doubt come to it. Already, indeed, as we have seen, buildings are springing up in the neighbourhood of the station; and where the lads played football that fine evening there will soon, in all probability, be a crowded street.

A fairly good road leads down by several zig-zags to the level of the water. Here a huge ferry-boat, capable of taking several waggons and carriages at a time, is worked on an ingenious principle. High up above the stream a wire cable is stretched across. Along this cable run two block pulleys, to which the ferry boat, floating some little distance down the stream, is attached. When all is ready for a start, the man in charge pushes off from shore and then, with a winch, hauls the bow of the boat up stream, till the side presents an angle of perhaps forty-five degrees to the swiftly rushing current. Being held at this inclination fore and aft, the boat is steadily forced across the river sideways till it grounds on the opposite bank. For the return voyage it is only necessary to reverse the position of the boat's head, letting it fall away into the rush of the current by just the requisite distance.

The town of Edmonton is not as yet a very imposing place, but it has certainly progressed since Colonel Butler described it twenty years ago in his book "The Great Lone Land." He there says: "Edmonton, the head-quarters of the Hudson Bay Company's Saskatchewan trade, and the residence of a chief factor of the corpora-

tion, is a large, five-sided fort, with the usual flanking bastions and high stockades. It has within these stockades many commodious and well-built wooden houses, and differs in the cleanliness and order of its arrangements from the general run of trading forts in the Indian country." The writer then proceeds to lament the lawlessness of the country and the powerlessness of the Hudson Bay officials to check or punish crimes of violence. How marvellous is the change that twenty years has brought about! Such a place as Edmonton is probably as safe and as easily governed as an English village to-day. The old fort, of which Butler says, "To recount the deeds of blood enacted round the wooden walls of Edmonton would be to fill a volume," stands to-day in its prominent position above the river, like a somewhat decayed farmhouse, while all around and along the bluffs are dotted the shanties or more substantial abodes of prosperous settlers who live secure, and to whom the stories of cruelties wrought by Cree or Blackfoot Indian must sound like tales from another world—even as they have ever been to the English schoolboy revelling amid the horrors so vividly portrayed for his delectation by Fenimore Cooper and his long line of followers.

But we must continue our narrative. Having duly admired the ferry arrangements, Donald Fairhope and his companions climbed the steep slope on the left bank of the river and soon found themselves in the centre of a straggling and miscellaneous congeries of wooden stores, hotels, shanties, and residences of various shapes and sizes. Having found the gentleman to whom

they had the introduction, the brothers met with a very hearty reception, and such measures as were possible at so late an hour were taken for the comfort of the newly arrived and now tired-out immigrants.

Early next morning a pioneer band, with Bert among the foremost, started for the place, some eight miles from the town, where a certain amount of land had been already secured, and where it was hoped another and a greater Pixley would arise, and where the advantages of close proximity, of neighbourly sentiment, and of common worship might coexist with the blessings of individual ownership and absolute independence. It was a grand dream, and each member of the party, according to individual light and ability, was zealous and eager to realize it.

In a few days all were hard at work. Fortunately, the weather was fine, and the cold was nothing like what it had been in passing through Manitoba. The children played wonderingly in front of the tents which sheltered them at night; the women were busy with household cares and open-air cooking; the men, while waiting the signal to put the plough into the virgin soil, were busy hauling logs and running up shanties. More substantial edifices would come later, and, as all hoped, before winter. They felt the advantage now of having taken time by the forelock and made an early start.

All were hopeful, all were busy; they were shut away from the outer world, and its affairs troubled them but little. Only when a day came that demanded a visit to Edmonton, there was

eager inquiry for letters. The greater number of the inquiries were futile: and though there was a letter from Hilda, the brothers agreed that it was unsatisfactory in the extreme. Was their father better or worse? When would he and Hilda join them? Had anything been heard of Uncle James? Could anything be done to discover Fraser's whereabouts? These and the like questions Donald and Bert discussed on more than one fine evening as they sat and rested after a long day's toil in front of the shanty that they had built themselves.





CHAPTER XVIII.

"FOR THE DEFENCE."

Poor Fraser ! It was a considerable time before he could realize the horror and actual danger of his position. That he should find himself a prisoner, accused of a deliberate and treacherous murder, seemed at first a mere fantastic nightmare, but when day followed day and no awakening came, he knew that it must be a horrible reality. The cold-blooded and audacious villainy of Parker staggered him, took away his breath, and certainly placed him at a great disadvantage. This man *knew* that he was innocent, and Nellie Fergie had told him in a few sweet, emphatic words, before he was taken away from Smooth Rock, that—however appearances might be against him—she could not believe him guilty. For the rest, he was generally condemned ; indeed, such was the popularity of young Fergie, and the disgust of the inhabitants at the staining of their historical record by so foul a crime, that the ominous word "lynch" was freely whispered about. The accused was an unknown man, a tramp and reputed gambler ; but for that

very reason the sheriff was the more keen to see that he got fair play. The official was proportionately relieved, therefore, when he got his prisoner safe to Calgary.

As Fraser Fairhope sat alone in his place of confinement, he had time to think over the incidents of the past few months. He knew that he did not deserve to be in his present position, but he recognized that he had brought his misfortunes on himself, through the rash self-confidence by which he had been so easily tripped up and sent headlong on the downward path to shame and sin.

For a couple of days he was so completely overwhelmed that he did not care even to give a thought to his defence. "I shall tell the simple truth," he said to a kindly clergyman, who came to visit him in his trouble. "And if that does not suffice, I must bear the consequence. I am no murderer, but I rightly deserve punishment for my folly and sin. I but receive the due reward of my deeds. I deserve no consideration or pity—I shall ask for none. Whatever befalls me I shall take it as coming from God. I've been a fool and worse. My life has been a failure—I am tired of it. I have brought scandal on my father's name; I could never look one of my family in the face again. My only regret is that my name is known; I should like that my shame had died along with me." And so he talked on and on, in mock-heroic style, though no doubt keenly cut to the heart and touched with genuine emotion.

"It is not a question of what you would have wished, my poor fellow," urged the clergyman,

"but of what is to be done, things being as they are. Your name *is* known, and therefore it is your business to clear it, if you possibly can. This is the only atonement you can make to your friends. Again, if I understand you aright, you profess to know who the real murderer is. If so, you are bound to bring him to justice. It is mere hollow cant to talk of accepting wrong and injustice as coming from God. If you deserve to suffer for other follies, you are suffering now—and you are right to bear your chastisement patiently as indeed allowed of God for your ultimate good. But you have no right to permit the guilty to escape, or to impede by your apathy the course of justice."

"I don't say that I know who the real murderer is—I don't know that a murder has been committed at all," explained Fraser; "but I know that the man who is my chief accuser is telling a deliberate and awful falsehood. He knows that it was he himself who was with Fergie that afternoon, and yet he is ready to swear that he was a hundred miles away."

"That is a suspicious point in itself, if what you say is true."

"And do you also doubt my word? If so, what is the use of a fellow telling the truth!" exclaimed Fraser, petulantly.

"I do not myself doubt that you believe what you say," replied the clergyman, quietly, "but remember these things must be proved. You may have been mistaken; even the youngest of us, as has been well said, is not infallible. Every man must be presumed innocent till he is proved guilty. If this man can establish an *alibi*, then——"

"Then I am to be hanged, I suppose," said Fraser.

"No, the case against you will remain where it was. Only it may prejudice you to have made a mistake as to this man's identity. But all this only shows how desirable it is that you should have a lawyer to defend you."

"I've no money," said Fraser, doggedly.

"We must not let that stand in the way," replied the clergyman; "only let me see about it, and I've no doubt I shall find a man willing to take up the case."

"No," replied Fraser, "I won't be defended for charity. For the present at least things must take their course."

The clergyman attempted some further remonstrance, but finding it useless, he soon after took his leave.

Early next morning a visitor was announced. It was Frank Lynton, who, having travelled right through from Montreal, had not lost an hour in obtaining permission to see the prisoner. The young lawyer at once took matters into his own hands.

"Mr. Fairhope, I have been sent to conduct your defence. I want you to be frank with me and to tell me all the ins and outs of the case. I have read strange things in the newspapers, and things I may say at once that seem to need explaining."

"May I ask, sir, who you are, and who has sent you here?" inquired Fraser, rather ungraciously.

"Easily answered. I am Mr. Lynton, a lawyer from Montreal. I have been sent here by your uncle, Mr. James Fairhope. He is with your

father and sister at Montreal. Your father is too ill to undertake any business, and your sister, Miss Fairhope, has not yet been informed of—of this trouble.”

“Thank God—thank God my poor father does not know! And Hilda too, my darling sister; and she had such confidence in me—such foolish, loving confidence!” And the poor young fellow for the first time completely broke down and burst into tears.

This display of natural feeling had the effect of breaking down every barrier between the young men, and they were soon deep in the case, discussing it as freely as though they had been old friends.

Mr. Lynton, accepting it as an axiom that Hilda's brother could not possibly be a criminal, immediately set himself to devise some theory of the crime—for that a crime had been committed there was no longer any reasonable doubt. The doctor's testimony was that while the immediate cause of death was suffocation, poor Fergie had received a blow on the back of the head probably sufficient in itself to cause death, and certainly sufficient to produce immediate insensibility.

“The question of motive is an important one,” said Lynton. “Now, there does not seem any reason why *you* should want to kill this man.”

“Far otherwise,” replied Fraser, “I was on my way to look for work at his place.”

“How do you account for the fact that nearly two dollars were found on you when arrested, whereas the man at the saloon says you were altogether cleaned out when you left his place?”

Fraser hesitated. "I am almost ashamed to tell," he stammered.

"But you will have to tell—the point must be cleared," said Lynton, peremptorily.

"The fact is a man who had won everything off me compelled me to take something back out of pity, just to help me on my way."

"Will you be able to find that man?"

"I hardly think so. He was a stranger to me, and I don't know where he was going."

"H'm—we shall have to hunt up that man. They'll hardly believe the story without. Now there is another question—how did you come by Mr. Fergie's revolver?"

Fraser Fairhope started. "Ah," he cried, "has that been found? I had clean forgotten about it."

For the first time the lawyer was conscious of a spasm of dread, if not of actual suspicion, that laid a momentary grip on his heart. Then he inquired minutely as to the way in which the pistol had been found and into Fraser's motives for concealing it.

"I understand you that it was lying, not on the trail but a little to one side—among the untrampled grass."

"Precisely," assented Fraser, who was not quite pleased at the way in which he was being cross-questioned.

"Then it could not have fallen accidentally from a rider's belt or pocket?"

"Now you say it, I do not see how it could."

"But it might easily have been thrown where you found it, either as the result of a tussle, or after it had been secretly abstracted. Now as to

your motive in concealing your find. You did not wish to frighten the ladies by appearing armed. So far well. But afterwards, when you came to be suspected, you never mentioned the pistol that you had hidden away in the loft where you slept. Asked why that was, you seem to answer in one breath that you had forgotten all about it; in the next, that you did not see why you should incriminate yourself."

"Will it incriminate me, do you think?" demanded Fraser.

"It may, and it may not," replied Lynton; "with wise men it ought not to have any such effect. No criminal in his senses would retain his victim's weapon or leave it where it was safe to be found. But you should make up your mind as to which of the two explanations of your silence is true."

"They are both true," said Fraser, indignantly. "At first I never thought about the pistol at all; afterwards it did occur to me; but by that time everybody seemed to have concluded that I was guilty, so I thought I would just hold my tongue."

"Well, let it pass," said the lawyer, somewhat impatiently. "There is a new point—I only heard of it this morning. A coat has been found."

"A coat? Whose coat? Where? What sort of a coat?" And the hot blood rushed into Fraser's face as he jerked out the questions.

Again Frank Lynton felt that inward twinge. He was beginning to have a very low opinion of this young man, but then, being Hilda's brother, he could not possibly be a criminal, though he might be a fool or something very like it. He answered, in grave, measured accents—

"A coat—a light, English-made overcoat, as I am informed—has been found close to the scene of the murder. Now, the report is going round that you were seen wearing such a coat at the dépôt, and subsequently at the saloon where you spent those profitable hours. I ask you, as your counsel and your friend, had you such a coat?"

"I had an overcoat, light, and made in England," was the embarrassed reply.

"But you have not got it now? You had not got it, had you, when you reached Fergie's ranch?" And Lynton, knowing how much depended on the answer, leant forward eagerly.

"No," said Fraser, "I—I lost it on the way."

"What do you mean by that? I must press the question." Frank Lynton spoke slowly and fixed his eyes on the prisoner.

"Must I tell?"

"Your life may depend—will, I think, depend on the explanation."

"Well, I am ashamed to say I gambled it away. A fellow that had seen me playing in the saloon met me after I had got a mile or so on the road. We got talking about my losses, and then he offered me five dollars for the coat. I took the money, and lost it all in ten minutes."

"And then it was that this large-hearted gambler pressed the two dollars upon you, so that you might not be moneyless as well as coatless?"

"I am telling you the truth, Mr. Lynton," said Fraser, with some dignity; "you can imagine that this confession is not pleasant to make, and therefore I would ask you to spare your sneers."

"Pardon me if my manner has been offensive,"

replied Mr. Lynton, frankly; "but I have no toleration for gambling, and such imbecility puts one out of patience. But there, let us stick to business. Do you think it possible that this man who won your coat was the criminal after all?"

"Scarcely; and besides, that would not account for Parker's lies," said Fraser, slowly. Then suddenly he cried out, "But wait, there is something else—something I had almost forgotten. Parker had a coat almost exactly the same as mine." And so with breathless eagerness he told the incident of the landing-stage at Quebec, and of the way in which his attention had been called to the similarity of Parker's coat to his own.

"I noticed it because they were made by the same tailor—S—— of Canterbury—and no doubt cut from the same piece of cloth. I remember the number too, written in ink under the maker's name—1108."

"This is a very extraordinary circumstance, and may form an important clue," exclaimed Lynton, as he rose and walked about the room with his hands in his pockets. "Was there a number on your own coat? if so, do you recall it?"

"There was a number, but I do not remember what it was," replied Fraser; "but about the other I have no doubt—1108. I can swear to it."

"Well, I shall have permission to examine the coat by-and-by—that is, if you appoint me to act for you. Then I must cable to the man in Canterbury—it may even be necessary to fetch him over. But mind, Fairhope, do not mention a word of this to any one. The whole trial may turn on the ownership of this coat. It may be a case of double

or quits with us. But there is one point more—as to Parker's possible motive. Do you know anything about that?"

"No, I cannot say that I do," replied Fraser. "I told you I met him and the Fergies and Miss Woods on the steamer coming out, and I have told you about the Quebec business. But I know nothing more about them."

"You seemed to think, however, that Parker and Fergie had been quarrelling."

"I can hardly say as much as that. As I told you, Fergie was vexed about something, and called it a swindle."

"And Parker replied, *it was an ugly word, and might lead to ugly consequences*. Sounds significant in the lurid light of subsequent events. It is evident that if Parker was on his trial, you would be an important witness against him. But now that you are on *your* trial, he will be an important witness against you."

"What do you think of it all?" asked Fraser, after he had watched the lawyer walking up and down for a few moments.

"I think we must find out more about the 'ugly word.' Were these men in partnership?"

"I almost fancy there was something of that sort, from the way they spoke on the ranch. Fergie had married Miss Woods, who went out with them, and *she* seems friendly enough with Parker; but Miss Fergie could not bear him, I am sure."

"So?" said the lawyer, interrogatively.

"She must think him a liar, because she told me herself that she had perfect confidence in my innocence. And of course the truth lies between

his word and mine." As he recalled the sweet confidence with which the girl had put her hand in his, a blush of happy pride spread over the prisoner's pale, anxious face.

"Oh, that is how the land lies, is it?" remarked Frank Lynton at the conclusion of a low whistle. "Well, I think my course now is to go and see Miss Fergie, and to discover what business relationships existed between her brother and this friend of the family."

"I am sure she will be glad to see you ; and I am sure she will give you every information in her power. You must also see Moose-jaw, the Indian. He is a deep fellow, and I cannot make him out. Sometimes I fancy he has not made up his mind ; but I verily believe that but for him I should have been lynched."

After some further consultation, Fraser's new friend rose to go. Then the prisoner asked him frankly what he thought of his chances.

"Well, it's this way," replied Lynton : "if Parker is the man, I feel sure we shall bring it home to him. An *alibi* founded on perjury is a dangerous and feeble weapon. But it is possible that the fellow you sold your coat to is the man. In that case it will be harder to prove your innocence. The fellow himself will, of course, keep out of the way ; whereas, if he is all right, he may be willing to come forward. He will hear of the case, for there is not a man in Canada, or the States, or England, who will not. You see much must depend on that coat. Still, even if the number is the one you have given me, that will prove nothing apart from the tailor's testimony. I will be able to

speak more decidedly when I have ascertained how money matters stood between Parker and poor Fergie."

"Then you think I have a chance?" said Fraser, who, despite himself, had become interested in all the points of the case.

"You have the certainty of a fair trial, and you may be sure nothing shall be left undone to establish your innocence."

"How can I thank you, Mr. Lynton? And why should you take so much trouble about a worthless fool of a fellow like me?" cried poor Fraser, as he grasped the hand of his new-found friend, while the tears filled his eyes.

"It is the duty, and I might say the instinct, of the lawyer to do his utmost for his client," replied Frank Lynton, affecting to laugh. "But this I will say, that if we get you acquitted of the graver charge, it will not be so easy to clear you from the imputation of having made a prodigious fool of yourself since your arrival in this country." He spoke bitterly, and was sorry for it after he had left the room. But anxious as he was on every ground to secure the poor fellow's acquittal, he was conscious of a rising feeling of resentment against one who, as the climax of a career of reckless foolishness and worse, brought an odious publicity and at least a partial discredit on the name of the woman that he loved.





CHAPTER XIX.

BROTHERS ONCE AGAIN.

THE brothers, long separated and long estranged, sat hand-in-hand in the shaded room. It was a thin, worn, scholarly hand that rested in the broad, hard, weather-tanned palm of one who had been for years a man of action, quick to strike, yet patient to endure. It might have been the hand of Jacob clasped at length in that of Esau.

They did not speak much. Years of solitude had made James Fairhope a taciturn man, and with George the difficulty of speaking was increasing every hour. Hilda's father had recovered fairly well from the first alarming attack, but a sudden access of cold weather had brought on bronchial trouble, with which the patient had but little strength to cope. It was too apparent that he was sinking gradually.

"I do not grudge the journey or the labour that has enabled me to place my hand in yours, Jim," whispered the clergyman, in response to the look of dumb pity with which his brother had been for some time regarding him.

"I thank God for having brought us together, anyhow. But I want to see you a well man again, George." And the response came in a rough whisper that contrasted with the thread-like voice of the invalid as strongly as did the two hands that lay clasped together on the counterpane.

"I'm as well a man as ever I want to be in this world ;" and the clergyman smiled faintly as he repeated the Americanism that had struck on his ear. "I have been hard on you, Jim—too hard. Who was I that I should judge another—ay, that I should judge my own brother?"

"I'm sure you never judged me a bit more hardly than I deserved ; nor can you have thought as cruelly of me as I have done of you. Why, there have been times when the devil came and rode beside me, and I could have found it in my heart to kill you. God forgive me for it now."

A faint flush of surprise or alarm at this fiery outburst mantled the hollow cheek. George Fairhope replied softly—

"I never could quite understand such animosity. Indeed, brother, I never intentionally harmed you—I never wronged you, except it might be by a too harsh condemnation of your follies."

"There, there," interrupted James Fairhope, somewhat impatiently, "let us not talk of it. Let bygones be bygones. We are brothers. Let the thought of *her* unite instead of separating us. The day's work is nearly over."

"There is one thing," said the clergyman, as though he had not heeded his brother's intreaty ; "as you have referred to dear Nina, I want you to believe that I never knew there had been anything

between you two till some time after she and I were married."

"You say that?"

"I do say that. Of course I knew you were very good friends, and I was sometimes jealous, fearing that Nina cared more for you than she did for me; but I never thought *you* meant anything. We none of us looked on you as what people call a marrying man. I was surprised when Nina told me, after Donald was born, how things had stood between you. I fear I was angry with her, poor soul; for it grieved me to think that I had played the supplanter to my only brother."

There was a long silence, broken only by the quick beat of the watch on the table at the bedside, and 'the almost equally rapid breathing of the dying man. Such silences come to us in life, when all the play of circumstances by which human affairs are shaped and determined is displayed before the awe-struck inner vision—the mysteries of the past, the realities of the present, the possibilities of the future. There was silence, till at last James Fairhope spoke.

"I believe you, George. So now, thank God, the last cloud has rolled from between us."

"But did you ever believe that I had really planned such a mean, unworthy thing?"

"What could I think? You had told our mother of some misconduct of mine—to call it by a mild name. The very next day Nina broke off her engagement with me. Six months later she was your wife."

The sick man moved his head wearily. "I could not help telling our mother, Jim. I could

not stand by and let her be ruined by your—your——”

“I do not blame you for that—I did not blame you at the time, George. Even then I felt you were right to protect her from an idle scamp such as I was. But it was what followed—the apparent design and purpose of it all. God forgive me for the thoughts I cherished about you.”

“And you really imagined all these years—— But no, let us not speak of it. All is clear between us now, brother, is it not?”

“Yes, all is clear, all is explained, all forgiven.”

There was another long silence. The two hands were clasped tighter together; the watch ticked as loudly as before; but the sufferer was quieter, and the breathing less laboured.

“You will have a care for *her* children, will you not, Jim?”

The words were scarce audible, and James Fairhope had to bend forward to catch their import. Then he said softly—for this rough backwoodsman could speak softly, though he was not much hand at whispering,

“They shall be as my own, George. Are they not *your's*, and are they not *her's*? You need have no fear about their future. That shall be my care and my pleasure in the years that I had been looking forward to with dread.”

“How kind—you could not be kinder. God has been very good to me. But where is Hilda? I want my little girl. I want my brave, big boys. Fine, well-grown lads, every one of them. Just the chaps for a new country. Have you seen them yet, Jim? Fraser is just the sort of fellow you

were at his age. He has reminded me of you a hundred times. But let me see, there is something about Fraser. He is not with the others. He went as pioneer, did he not? Foolish boy. Too self-confident, too self-reliant. That's what I used to say to him. Don't you think I was right, Jim, old boy?"

"Hush, hush, George. Try and get a sleep now, for you are tired. The boys will be here by-and-by, and Hilda is in the next room."

"Yes, I'm feeling just a little confused and weary; but it's all so happy now, that I think I shall be able to sleep nicely."

And so, like a tired but contented child, he dropped off into a peaceful doze, his hand locked in that of his now reconciled brother.

Sitting there a not unwilling prisoner, James Fairhope let his thoughts drift back to bygone years. He remembered how sweet it had been to carry on a clandestine courtship of Nina Graham. There was no need that it should have been clandestine, since the Graham and Fairhope families were on friendly terms and lived close together. Only James, having already the reputation of a ne'er-do-well, feared that his suit might find disfavour with Mr. and Mrs. Graham, while with his own family he was at more or less open warfare on account of his idleness and extravagance. Then had come the open rupture. George had interfered, perhaps of necessity, but certainly in somewhat high-handed fashion, to save his mother from serious pecuniary embarrassments in which James's proceedings had threatened to involve her. Then Nina, influenced in some

measure by her parents, but not at all by George Fairhope, had broken off her engagement. James Fairhope felt himself deserted, and he found it easy to believe that he was the victim of a deliberate plot laid against him by his brother. Without a word of warning, he left home and sailed for America. He became an outcast and an alien, and in his self-chosen exile the iron entered into his soul. He brooded over his imaginary wrongs, and acquired the habit of exaggerating the intensity of a passion which, until it had been disappointed, he had made sufficiently light of. With gloomy pleasure he nursed his grief amid the vast solitudes of the North-West. To get further and further away from civilization, and the chances of civilized intercourse, was his one ambition. The more remote and difficult of access any fort or station was, so much the more did it please him to be sent there. As years went on he had indeed become somewhat softened towards his brother; and, as we have seen, an intermittant and formal correspondence had been kept up between them. But to the last James was fixed in his resolve never to return to England. And now, despite that resolve, he found himself sitting by George's bedside, with that thin white hand in his.

In half an hour Mr. Fairhope awoke refreshed and with his mind quite clear.

"I'm troubled about Hilda," he said. "She used to be so bright and cheerful."

"She is bright and cheerful now, so far as anxiety for her father will permit," replied James.

"Ah, but you did not know her as she used to be. She could not be otherwise than loving,

gentle, and amiable ; but I feel sure that a cloud has come over her life. In the old days she used to be so frank, fearless, and happy. She went about Pixley as though the whole place belonged to her. All the parishioners loved her, and she seemed to return their affection. I would have said that her heart was bound up with the old place, yet when it came to the point, she was in a very fever to get away. Of course there was a cause, but it did not seem sufficient."

"And that cause was——" suggested James.

The clergyman told the story of Mr. Buckthorpe's proposal. He told it apologetically, and emphasized the fact that he had put no pressure on Hilda, and had never reproached her for refusing the squire.

"Still, it would make the position uncomfortable for her."

"I don't know. Buckthorpe went abroad shortly after. And besides, the change in Hilda had begun at an earlier period. She is as good and dutiful as ever ; but somehow a cloud has come between us, and it has fretted me very much."

"Do you think," said James Fairhope, slowly, "there could have been—I mean, could she have formed any attachment—anything you did not know of?"

"What! Hilda, *my* daughter?" And in his excitement the invalid tried to raise himself on his elbow. Then, touched it may be by some memory of the past, he continued in a subdued tone, "I don't think she would have kept anything from me, James. Besides, there was no one at Pixley.

She had not been away on any visit. No; such a thing would have been impossible."

"Oh, well, it may have been something trifling. I suppose as young people grow up changes come that we older people can't exactly go with or understand. But I am sure, George, Hilda is a downright good girl. I'm real fond of her, I can tell you."

"Thank you, Jim, for saying that. You'll be a father to her, I know, and to the boys. How wonderful are the ways of Providence! I am dying here a stranger in a strange land; and yet because of you being here, I feel happier than if I had left my darling in England, where she might naturally have looked for friends and sympathy."

"Frank Lynton is a 'very fine fellow,'" remarked James, apparently *apropos* of nothing.

"Yes; he has verily been as a son to me. Indeed, his tenderness and thoughtfulness is such as one would not expect to find in any man. I feel of course that it is a great deal for Hilda's sake, but none the less I must feel grateful. And here again I can't understand the child. She has a high opinion of this young man—she is never weary of singing his praises; and yet in his presence she seems reserved and stiff, as though she dreaded to encourage his attentions."

"But you can't judge how the lass behaves to him when your back is turned," said James, with a laugh, for he noted that something of the old irritation and bewilderment was gathering round again.

"Well, well, that is true. Still, there is something I do not like. It is hard that there should

be a cloud between me and my darling, even in the last hours of my life. It is very hard."

"Come, come, you must not talk like that George," remonstrated the elder brother, affectionately. "Please God, you will be spared to us for many a long day yet. I will call Hilda, and she shall sing to you some of her pretty hymns and cheer you up."

"Thank you, Jim, thank you; but it's not worth while to call the dear child just yet. I think I could sleep again for a bit now. Nothing does me so much good as to feel my hand in your's. You were always a strong chap, Jim—even as a boy—and I used to be so proud of you. And now I feel your hand sustains me. I feel that God has sent you to uphold me. He is very good, very good and merciful. *Laus Deo, Laus Deo.*"

So murmuring to himself, he dropped off to sleep, smiling like a contented child. Thus Hilda found her father and uncle when she entered the room half an hour later.

Instantly the girl's quick eye detected a subtle change in the sleeper's appearance.

"He must have something," she whispered. Then she gently roused him and held a spoonful of brandy and water to his lips.

The dying man had just strength to swallow the stimulant. Having done so he opened his eyes and looked dreamily round the room, till finally his gaze settled on Hilda's face. That at least was familiar, though all else was strange and bewildering.

"Thank you, dear, thank you; that is quite

enough. I feel stronger now. I think I must have been dreaming—dreaming of old times and of poor Jim. But it is not Sunday, is it? I don't feel equal to any duty, though, thank God, I suffer no pain. I'll be better in a day or two. . . . The voyage will do me good, I'm sure it will . . . and then we shall all be united—quite a happy family. . . . But it's strange there is no letter from Fraser. . . . And then about Hilda. I'm not satisfied. There is something wrong—I know there is . . . there is no use saying to the contrary. I am her father—I ought to know. She was always such a sweet, confiding girl. But now there is a cloud—I saw it coming up like a man's hand—then it got big and black and threatening. It won't go away, and I feel cold, so very cold."

"Father, dear father, there is no cloud between us; you only fancy it. Look at me. Don't you know me—your little Hilda?" and the tears fell fast as she bent to kiss his hollow cheek.

"Well, well, I suppose it's all right. James thinks it is, and he ought to know. Good night, darling. I think I can get to sleep now." Then, with a gentle sigh, he turned his head on the pillow and slipped away into unconsciousness.

For a couple of hours longer the watchers sat in silence. At intervals Mr. Fairhope opened his eyes and seemed to be awake, and Hilda was prompt to seize every such occasion to administer a small quantity of nourishment or stimulant. But the time came when this was no longer possible. The dying man refused to swallow, there was less and less light of recognition or intelligence in the eyes, that at last seemed to

open mechanically. A profound stillness and a wondrous sense of peace seemed to fill the room. The breathing grew fainter, and ever more faint, till at last it ceased. Then they knew the end had come. The voyage was over, and yet another migrating soul had reached the still havens of that new world where "there shall be no more sea."





CHAPTER XX.

TRUTH OUT AT LAST.

HHE sometime Rector of High Pixley, England, had been laid to rest in the beautifully situated cemetery on the slope of the mountain that Hilda had admired so much on the occasion of that memorable drive. There was nothing now to detain Hilda in Montreal; and she was therefore ready to go West as soon as matters could be arranged for the journey. It only remained for James Fairhope to tell the poor girl of the terrible accusation that was hanging over her brother to transform that readiness into feverish impatience.

For a whole day James had hesitated to perform the inevitable task, but a letter received from Lynton the following morning supplied the necessary stimulus. He told the sad story simply, while Hilda listened in wonder and growing indignation.

"And Mr. Lynton knew about this all the time?"

"He heard of it—read it in the papers as soon as the steamer arrived at Quebec. That was why he came on to Montreal with you."

"Ah, now I understand," said Hilda, softly.

"Understand what?"

"His manner. It was always so gentle, so full of—of pity. It used to annoy me sometimes, because I thought he treated me and dear father as if we were just helpless children."

"He was very anxious that poor George should not get to hear anything about this awful affair, especially while he was so ill. But you had better read his letter now. I don't know whether the writing is indistinct, or whether the fault is with my old eyes. But there are a few words which I cannot quite make out. Read it out."

And so Hilda read—

"MY DEAR FRIEND,

"You will be anxious to hear how I have prospered in my mission. So far well, I am thankful to say. I need not tell you I am convinced of your nephew's innocence; but more than that, I am almost convinced that he has been made the victim of a deliberate plot for the purpose of shielding the real criminal. But if so, the plot has been well laid, and appearances are terribly against the prisoner. I have obtained a postponement of trial, and shall probably have to seek a yet further extension. For one witness I must send to England, and of another most important one I have as yet no trace. It is in reference to this man that I am hoping you will be able to help or advise. He goes, they tell me, by the name of Jamaica Jim, and is a trapper from the Peace River district. Perhaps you have heard of the fellow, can tell us something about him, and how we ought to go about

finding him. Possibly he is himself the murderer, and in that case he will of course keep out of the way if he can manage it. But I do not think that this is so. And if I am right, the man ought to have no objection to come forward, if only we can communicate with him. But that is where the difficulty lies. Those that know the man think that, having finished his business in Winnipeg and elsewhere, he has probably gone away to the North-West by Edmonton and Athabasca Landing. What do you think of this theory? and have you ever heard of the man? This last question is so vital that I think I will ask you to wire reply.

"I shall be anxious to hear how Mr. Fairhope is, and also how *she* bears up. I do trust that this horrible business, of which the papers will all be so full, will not have been rudely forced upon her notice. The dear girl has trouble enough to bear already. The doctor told me he did not think your brother would last many weeks. Better then that he should die untroubled. I cannot but feel how providential it was that you should have turned up just when the need of your presence was so urgent. And now, perhaps, you will be the salvation of the case in the matter of Jamaica Jim.

"Good-bye, true friend.

"Ever yours,

"FRANK LYNTON.

"P.S.—It is happiness to know that my most precious interests are safe in your hands, and that you will be ready to put in a good word for me 'as opportunity serves.'"

Hilda Fairhope read the letter through, not

without some hesitations, caused perhaps by the hurried writing of which her uncle had complained. But surely no such account could be given of the tremulous intonation and flushed cheek that emphasised, despite the reader, certain words. Having read the postscript, she inquired with apparent innocence—

“What does he mean by his ‘precious interests,’ uncle? It sounds a funny expression.”

Now, Uncle James had overlooked the postscript and accordingly the suddenness of the question floored him.

“I really don’t know, my dear. Oh yes, I believe I do. Some little joke that was between us. Yes, it *is* a funny expression—‘precious interests’—not, very business-like or lawyer-like. But there is something more to the point than that. I had better go and wire the good news to him right away.”

“What good news?” asked Hilda, who did not seem too pleased to have her curiosity about the ‘precious interests’ thus cavalierly treated.

“Why,” exclaimed the old backwoodsman, drawing himself up to his full height, “about Jamaica Jim, of course. He asks if I know him. That’s a question! Why, I shot the old scamp once myself, and got him off being hanged twice. I’ll know where to lay my hand on him, you bet; that is, if he is in the land of the living. Say, Hilda, when will you be ready to start West?”

“I am ready now, uncle,” she replied, looking up at him through eyes brimful of tears and excitement.

“Right you are, girl. But there is no train till

evening, so you will have time to fix everything up. Meantime, I'll send a wire to the lawyer chap. Say, have you any message for him? He might take it kind."

"I'd dearly love to ask him about that 'precious interests' joke," said the girl, with a bright smile. "But no; just say that Hilda thanks him for all he is doing."

"Right you are, miss; I'll fix it up short and sweet;" and Uncle James went out of the room rubbing his hands and twittering to himself.

Hilda Fairhope had looked forward with glowing anticipation to the rail journey through the woods and prairies; she had posted herself in the admirably "Annotated Time Table," issued by the C.P.R., and had pictured each scene in fancy. But once on the cars she found herself in no humour to appreciate the certainly long-drawn-out interests of the wonderful line. She was in a fever of anxious longing to be with her brother. The thought of the hundreds and hundreds of miles of forest, lake, and rolling prairie that intervened almost maddened her. She could not sit still. The train did not go fast enough. Time after time she went and stood on the platform at the end of the Pullman, and looked out on the long straight track that seemed as though it had just been scored out of the silent, primæval forest or across the open prairie by the flying cars. Hour after hour the string of great cars thundered along through what seemed a veritable No Man's Land. The morning broke. Breakfast was ready in the dining car, and by-and-by it was lunch, and then it was dinner, and then the negro attendant came with stealthy

tread to make all comfortable for the night in the sleeper. Then followed some hours of broken sleep, and through all the thunder, thud, and swing of the unwearied train. To such feverish impatience the journey seemed interminable. On the afternoon of the second day, Montreal was a thousand miles away, but the journey was not yet half through. However, all things have an end, and in due time, and "on time" too, Calgary was reached—two thousand two hundred and sixty-four miles from Montreal!

It was half-past two in the morning, but Calgary was wide awake, and the depôt was a scene of great animation. The east-bound train, being also on time, was waiting, and friendly greetings were being exchanged between the officials as the cars of the incoming train drew slowly up. Among the crowd, chiefly composed of young men that thronged the platform, Hilda at once recognized Mr. Lynton. A minute later the young lawyer was on board the car welcoming uncle and niece, and eager to assist the latter with her baggage.

"My poor brother—how is he?" inquired the girl, with suppressed eagerness, Frank Lynton holding her hand the while.

"He bears up well—bravely and patiently. It is a great trial this, dear Miss Fairhope, but I believe you will be supported under it. I have to thank you for your kind message; it made me very happy."

To which Hilda, not knowing what Uncle James might or might not have said in the telegram, answered diplomatically—

"We owe you a deep debt of gratitude, Mr. Lynton. I could not but thank you both for what you are doing, and—and for the consideration you displayed for poor dear father and myself. I am afraid that the day you left Montreal you were not pleased with me."

"Not pleased with you! Oh, Miss Fairhope, do not talk like that!"

But here the conversation was interrupted, nor was there any opportunity to resume it.

"Will you take my arm, Miss Fairhope? It is rather rough just here," said Frank Lynton, as the little party emerged from the depôt. "The Alberta is close by, and the porter will carry the rest of the baggage. This way, Mr. Fairhope—mind that hole."

Hilda took the proffered assistance, but as she did so she uttered a suppressed cry, and Mr. Lynton felt her fingers clutch his arm.

"What is the matter? Have you hurt yourself?" he asked hurriedly.

"Oh, it is nothing," she replied. "Something startled me. I suppose I am tired and shaken, after the interminable racket of the train. A few minutes in the air will set me right." But she let go his arm, and moved a little way so as to be nearer her uncle.

After breakfast next morning the young lawyer opened up his case, entering into every detail and hiding nothing.

"The matter stands thus," he concluded: "Fraser being acquitted—at least by us—there remain two possible criminals—the one, Jamaica Jim, who, according to your account of him, Mr. Fairhope,

would be quite capable of the crime ; the other, this man who calls himself Parker."

"Calls himself? Is that not his real name, then?" inquired Fairhope.

"That I can't say for certain yet," replied Lynton, "but I should not be surprised to find that he had several *aliases*. His record, even for the short distance I have been able to trace it, is shady enough. He seems to have been in partnership with some of those scoundrels in London who advertise that they can get young fellows into advantageous positions as farmers—of course for a consideration. From what Miss Fergie tells me, her brother had got into the clutches of one of these so-called agents. Then Parker came out along with them, professing to have himself paid a premium. But I suspect he was a mere decoy. There were various money transactions which neither the girl nor the poor young widow could explain ; but it is quite clear that whether Parker had a share in the big swindle or not, he had done a good deal on his own account in the way of getting money out of Fergie, who seems to have been an unsuspecting nice young fellow, with a fairly rich mother at his back."

"Well, then, if it is only one man's word against another's, and you can prove a motive in Parker's case where there was none in my poor nephew's, we ought to win, oughtn't we?" interrupted Mr. Fairhope.

"Yes ; but there are two further considerations," replied Lynton, gravely. "It is admitted that this poor lad was in the neighbourhood at the time. He was penniless, presumably desperate, and I am

sorry to say his record, from the time of his first appearance in Winnipeg, is not in his favour. On the other hand, Parker maintains that he was thirty miles the other side of Calgary at the time of the murder, and he says that he will be able to prove it. Then there is the coat incident; that as it stands look very black."

"But you don't really believe, sir, after all your professions, that my brother is a murderer?" exclaimed Hilda, with flashing eye and quivering lip.

Frank Lynton smiled a sad, gentle smile. "Of course we *know* that he is innocent; but we must look at the matter as others look at it—others who are not his friends. I have had a reply cablegram from the tailor man at Canterbury; but he gives no particulars, and mentions no names. It seems to me he wants to get a trip to America at somebody else's expense. No, I believe the whole issue will now turn on our producing Jamaica Jim."

"And if you give me time enough, I'll produce him. Only it will take time," said James Fairhope.

"How long do you think?" asked Lynton.

"That is what no living man could say," replied the old traveller. "We might have him back here in a month, or it might be six. There is first the train to Edmonton; then a hundred miles or so by stage to Athabasca Landing; then the river. That is where the first uncertainty comes in. So much depends on the weather, on the state of the stream, on the Indians, and on a lot of other things. Then there is the uncertainty about the

man himself, and where he is to be sought. He may be on the Peace River, or Great Slave Lake, or away up the Mackenzie. No, I can't fix a date; but this I'll promise, that if the man is anywhere alive in the North-West Territory, I'll track him out and bring him here."

"Perhaps the man may not have got so far away, and you might hear of him at Edmonton, or about there," suggested Lynton.

"It's possible, but not likely. If he were still hanging round you'd think he'd have heard of the murder, and of his being wanted to clear an innocent man; and I don't see why he wouldn't come forward."

"But suppose he is guilty himself?" suggested the lawyer.

"In that case you may rely on it he'd have cleared as far out as he possibly could."

"But would he return to his old hunting-grounds? would it not be safer to go elsewhere?"

"He couldn't help it," replied James Fairhope. "He'd be bound to go the old trail. He wouldn't know himself in any other region than that in which he was born and bred. I know the man, and he'd sooner be hunted to the death there than get away with his life to any other place on earth."

"Well, I do not anticipate any difficulty in obtaining a delay of trial," said Lynton; "but it will be hard on an innocent man being kept in prison so long."

"Kept in prison!" cried Hilda. "You don't mean that they will keep Fraser in prison? Would they not let him out on bail, if we all promised

he would not try to go away? Oh, surely they would. You could arrange it, couldn't you, Mr. Lynton?"

"I fear not," he said slowly. "For your sake I would gladly take his place, Miss Fairhope. But it is impossible,"





CHAPTER XXI.

THE PIXLEY IMMIGRANTS.

JAMES FAIRHOPE was eager to commence his journey, but it was first necessary to come to a decision as to what Hilda was to do. She had been allowed to see her brother once, and though the interview was of necessity somewhat painful, her desire was to remain as near him as possible. But this could not well be managed. Hilda knew no one in Calgary. Mr. Lynton was about to return to Montreal, and the task undertaken by James Fairhope was too important to brook delay. Finally it was decided that Hilda should proceed with her uncle to Edmonton, and take up her abode at the Pixley settlement, while he pushed forward on his quest into the heart of the desolate North-West Territory. After all, Edmonton was but a day's travel from Calgary, and Hilda looked forward to obtaining early permission to visit Fraser again soon.

No sooner had the Pixley immigrants run up three or four rough shanties on their associated holdings, than they convened a solemn meeting and

passed a resolution to the effect that the new settlement should be called Fairhope, the name being of happy omen in itself, and likewise commemorative of the founder of the enterprise. Fairhope had been in existence but a few weeks when Hilda and her uncle arrived there, but already the place was taking to itself the airs of a respectable middle-aged town.

But so hard had these Fairhoppers been working, and so completely had they cut themselves off from the outer world, that no rumour had reached them of the mysterious crime with which poor Fraser had become so unfortunately mixed up. They had heard, however, by letter of the death of their beloved leader and pastor, and the intelligence had filled the little community with unfeigned grief.

When Hilda and her uncle arrived at Edmonton they found Donald and Cuthbert waiting for them at the dépôt.

Bert immediately took possession of his uncle, and proceeded to "draw" the old gentleman on the subjects with which he was most likely to be at home—canoeing, sledging, moose-hunting, fur-trading; and Uncle James answered the lad's questions, and listened to his suggestions with infinite patience and good-humour.

Meanwhile Donald whispered apart with his sister.

"Poor dear father! It seems quite strange for you to be here without him. Well, we must make a home for you, darling, and you shall be queen of our little community. But tell me, has nothing been heard of poor old Fraser? It seems extra-

ordinary that he should have been so completely lost."

Hilda could scarce command her voice to reply. "He has been heard of, but it is a long story, and I cannot tell it now. *You* have heard nothing—nor any of our people?"

"No. We get no news at our place; we are too far away and too busy. But what have you heard, Hilda? Nothing amiss, I hope?" for he noted the sorrowful change that had come over her usually bright, hopeful face.

"There *is* something amiss, Donald dear; but we will talk of it by-and-by. Uncle is anxious now to arrange about a journey he has to undertake."

"But you are both coming back with us to Fairhope, are you not?" inquired Donald in a disappointed tone.

"I think not to-night. Uncle wants to make a very early start in the morning for a place called Athabasca Landing."

"But what is he in such a hurry for? Can't he wait a day anyhow?" remonstrated Donald. "Oh, sir," he added, turning to the old man, "you must come and see our settlement. We want your advice about a lot of things. You can surely give us a day or two."

"Come into the hotel, and let us talk the whole matter over quietly." So saying, James Fairhope strode across the roadway to the hotel, where he was sufficiently well known to command extra attention and respect. By a word with the obliging landlord, a private room was secured, and there the little family party assembled for consultation.

Poor Donald! It was a hard matter to restrain

him, so intense was his excitement when he heard of the cruel charge that had been laid against the brother to whom he was devoted. He wanted to be off to Calgary at once, and fumed at the thought that there would be no train for thirty-six hours. He would demand his brother's instant release. He would explain to the authorities what fools they had been. He would find Parker, and shake the truth out of him.

"More to the point," put in Bert, "to find Jamaica Jim and judiciously squeeze the truth out of him. Uncle, I have a favour to ask."

"And what may that be, sir?" said the old man, who evidently approved of Cuthbert's practical way of looking at things.

"I want you to let me be your companion on this journey. I'll make myself generally useful, you bet, and I'm not a great weight. Do take me with you, uncle. I can ride, and drive, and shoot, and swim; I'll look to the horses, and do any mortal thing you want done."

"That is a very sweeping promise." And the old adventurer looked with kindly but piercing eye at the enthusiastic youth. "But possibly I might do worse. You'd be good company, and that is all I want, for I've been the road by myself many a time. And so you know something about horses, young man?"

Bert's thoughts went back to the day when he had ridden Vindictive for old Squire Buckthorpe and the groom to see, and his eyes filled with tears as he recalled how proud his father had been of his achievement. For a moment he could not speak, so he simply nodded his head.

"My word!" exclaimed Donald; "Bert's modesty has had the unusual effect of making him dumb. But really, sir, if you want a driver warranted furious, or a groom warranted reckless, you couldn't have a better companion than Bert. He was born to be a jockey, or something in that line."

"Well, do you know I don't think I could refuse the young man after such a recommendation as that," said James Fairhope. "Fact is, I feel getting a bit old to take on a job of this sort all by myself, and yet I don't want to be bothered with any of these scoundrelly half-breeds hanging around after me. There's not much they can teach *me*, and I've long ago given up trying to teach them manners, or sobriety, or truthfulness, or anything else. I can do with a pure-blood Indian, but not with one of those chaps. Let it be a bargain, then. You, Donald, take Hilda home in Cuthbert's place, and the lad shall come along with me, and I'll show him a bit of the life his uncle has led for twenty years."

"Agreed, sir. Thank you. You're a brick!—I mean I'm much obliged. I'll do my level best, and I'll tell you how I rose and rode Vindictive—I will indeed." And then the lad sprang to his feet with what he imagined to be an Indian "whoop," and professed his readiness to start at once.

"Well, then, Master Donald, you had better be on your track as quickly as possible, for there will be no moon to-night. And Bert and I will turn in as soon as I've seen the horse I am to have. I want to be away at four o'clock at latest; for we'll have a good seventy miles to cover before nightfall."

"I'd like to stay up all night so as to be sure of being in good time. I wouldn't mind one bit," cried Cuthbert. "But I say, Don, you'll have an eye to all the live stock—at least to the dogs, the pony, and the mare—while I'm away. And mind your driving with Hilda to-night. You know there are a couple of queer places on the road."

"Ay," replied Donald, good-humouredly, "there is the place where you nearly upset us this morning. I'll not forget."

"Now, that is not fair. It was just as much your fault as mine. You wouldn't sit still, and I——"

"Come, come, lads, no wrangling. Let's order a cup of good coffee to be got ready while we see to our beasts. You can rest yourself a bit, Hilda, and have an eye to the supper. We won't be long." So saying, the old man left the room, followed by his two admiring nephews.

Hilda had been but a few moments alone, when she was roused from the reverie into which she had fallen by the sound of a knock at the door. Then, without waiting for permission, some one walked in and closed the door. Hilda Fairhope sprang to her feet, and found herself face to face with Richard Buckthorpe! He was greatly altered, however. He looked haggard and aged, and it was not till he had addressed her in the old soft tone—half deferential, half bantering—that the girl was certain of his identity.

"Strange that we should meet again in this out-of-the-way place, Miss Fairhope. And yet not so very strange after all, for though Canada is a big place, there are not so many people in it but that

you may manage to discover a friend when you have a mind to."

"You know that I had no desire that we should ever meet again. How did you find out that I was here?" stammered Hilda. She coloured angrily, perceiving when it was too late that the question into which she had been betrayed would serve as a pretext for prolonging the conversation.

"I saw you at Calgary the other night, and I think you saw me too, though, being otherwise occupied, you did not care to recognize an old pal."

"Sir, you have no right to speak to me in such a way. I have suffered enough for my folly, and do not wish to have any further intercourse with you. I know your character."

"Or want of it," he said, with a soft laugh. "But seriously, Hilda, it was a very sweet folly. I can't forget it. I can't get over it, though I don't deny that I have tried to. But when I saw you the other night at Calgary all the past rushed back on me. I knew then that I really loved you, loved you as I never loved any woman before. I have been thinking of you ever since, and when I saw you take the train this morning, I could not choose but come after you."

"Mr. Buckthorpe, let us have done with this," said Hilda, with great dignity. "I know I have been very foolish, and even sinful. I can never forget how I deceived my dear dead father. How can you expect me to endure your presence? You abused my girlish ignorance and vanity. You played with me for your own amusement. You deceived me in every way."

"It may be true in part, my pretty preacher ;

and I know I haven't always been a very good boy. But I've met with the fate of those who play with fire and edged tools. I've burnt myself and cut myself; but I don't mind—it is a delicious pain. You cannot doubt my love for you, Hilda, now that I have come back to you."

"Be silent, sir. Do not dare to speak to me in such a way, or I shall call out of this window for help;" and with a quick movement the girl stepped back towards the open casement.

"Oh no, you don't," sneered Richard Buckthorpe, lifting his hand, but not venturing to move from where he stood. "I've something to say anent that unfortunate brother of your's that has got run in on this killing business."

"Ah! 'tis like your cruelty to speak of that," she exclaimed.

"No cruelty about it, miss. I want to get him off; and I'm the man that can do it, too." Then he waited, with a quiet smile, well knowing that she would take the bait.

"You believe him innocent—you *know* that he is."

"Yes, I know that he is innocent; and even if he wasn't, you don't think I want *your* brother, my darling, to be hanged for murder."

She winced, but remained silent, and suffered him to proceed.

"There is a man named Parker mixed up in the affair; in fact, the honours are divided between him and your brother."

"Do you know Parker?" And again the girl was ready to bite her tongue through for this impetuous way she had of asking questions.

Buckthorpe smiled grimly as he replied, "Yes, I know him—have known him a long time. I confess I like him, though he is a scamp, and has some very bad points."

"He is a murderer!" cried Hilda, indignantly.

"That is an ugly expression, vulgar, and quite too strong. The fact is, I know something of how it happened. Let us say it was an accident, the result of a quarrel, a thing not intended, a thing bitterly regretted, a thing——"

"But about poor Fraser—he had nothing to do with it?"

"Nothing whatsoever. And that is what I want to come to. If you'll be reasonable, Hilda, and let bygones be bygones, I pledge you my word, your brother shall be cleared—he shall be cleared; ay, at whatever risk it may be to any one else. Now say, Hilda, will you become my wife as soon as your brother is free? Will you help me to lead a new and better life? Will you come and be my good angel? I know you loved me once, and I believe you have still a soft place in your heart for D.-D.-D."

There was a momentary pause, and, thinking he had gained his point, he was just stepping forward. Then her voice, stern, low, and quivering, arrested him.

"You wretched, wicked man—you friend and partner of a murderer, to what a depth of degradation you must have sunk before you could make such a proposal! I would say I *hated* you, only pity and contempt leave room for no other emotion in my heart."

"Ah, well, they say that pity is akin to love,"

he replied, with unruffled coolness ; "but I'll give you time to turn it over in your mind, my dear ; and perhaps you won't be quite so melodramatic by-and-by. You are not inclined to do me justice this evening."

"I think you had better go ; I see my uncle and brothers coming," said Hilda.

"Yes, I agree with that sentiment ; I *had* better go," he replied with alacrity. "I trust to your honour and common sense not to say anything about this little interview of ours." Then he slipped noiselessly from the room.

Half an hour later, Hilda and Donald had started for Fairhope, while Uncle James and Bert stood watching them from the verandah of the hotel.

"Now, my boy, time to turn in," said the old man, as soon as the buggy which Donald was driving disappeared through a clearing in the bush beyond the railway.

"All right, sir ; I suppose some one will call us."

"You may leave that to the old 'un. I'll have you routed out as soon as it's necessary. Now, good night. Make the most of time."

With this piece of good advice sounding in his ears, Cuthbert went up to the snug room that had been provided for him. It is wonderful how comfortable they can make you at the hotels, even in the most out-of-the-way places, in the North-West. But the lad was so happy and so proud of himself that he could not easily comply with his uncle's injunction to make the best of his time. He lay awake, and tossed about. He imagined himself a veritable hero of the prairies and the woods. He

conjured up visions of all sorts of dangers, and placed himself in the most trying situations. He was guiding with unerring instinct a fiery steed as it flew across the trackless wastes; he was shooting the most fearful rapids in the frailest of canoes; he was standing unarmed and calm in the midst of hostile Indians; he was encouraging his uncle, recovering a lost trail—he was doing all sorts of wonderful things, and winning applause from everybody. Thus, with his mind in a perfect whirl of delicious excitement, he gradually dropped off to sleep.





CHAPTER XXII.

UNCLE JAMES DISCOURSES.

THE travellers got away in excellent time next morning, and Bert's promptitude and punctuality made a favourable impression on his uncle. The country was undulating, park-like, and fairly well wooded. The road consisted of a clearly marked track across the open, unploughed land, along which the light four-wheeled buggy sped swiftly and smoothly. Occasionally, however, there came a rough bit where a number of logs had been laid side by side, so as to form a rude bridge or causeway across stream or piece of boggy ground. Bert, accustomed to the smoothness of English roads—where on one loose stone of extra regulation size is a veritable scandal and stumbling-block—was astonished at the apparent recklessness of his uncle's driving. There was no diminution of speed, no picking and choosing of the road, but on the wiry horse sped, a hoof now on the verge of an ugly hole, now crashing gaily through a rotten log, while the light but strongly built carriage jumped and jolted and swung behind.

For several miles outside Edmonton the land was cultivated in patches, and farmhouses were to be seen, some close to the track, and some dotted at intervals against the horizon. But as the morning went on such indications of man's presence became more and more infrequent; and when at last a halt was made for early dinner, it was in the midst of a vast solitude. The trail also had disappeared—at least to Bert's inexperienced eye there was no indication of a road. It seemed as though the horse had, for the last couple of hours, been just following the impulse of his own sweet will.

"Do you really know where you are, uncle, or have you to steer by the sun in a place like this?" inquired Bert, as he let his eyes slowly travel round the vast horizon.

"Know where I am!" cried the old man, with a hearty laugh; "why, of course. We are on the king's highway, the Royal Mail-coach road from Edmonton to Athabasca Landing, thirty-one miles from the former place, and seventy about from the latter. We've made good travelling this morning, I can tell you, my boy."

"But I see no road," said Bert, as he contracted his gaze to search the green expanse immediately round their halting-place.

"Well, not just here, perhaps, though an Indian or a half-breed would see it quite plain; but look upon the hillside yonder, and you will be able to follow the road well enough;" and so saying, the old Hudson Bay man pointed with his long arm and thin finger to what looked like a very faint sheep-track on the slope of a hill about a quarter of a mile ahead.

"Oh, I see, I see," cried the lad, delighted. "I dare say with a little experience I'd soon learn to follow up a trail, and all that. It must be glorious fun. And I say, uncle, what a splendid country it is all round! Why ever don't people come and settle here?"

"They'll come by-and-by when the place gets known about, and quicker than some of us wish, too," growled the old man.

"But why shouldn't you wish to see the place settled, sir?" exclaimed Bert.

"Because what you call *settling* means nothing but *unsettling*. It unsettles the Indians, it unsettles the game, it unsettles the Company's trade; though I admit it has settled the buffalo."

"Settled the buffalo?"

"Yes, there is not a blessed buffalo left in the country. The inflow of the human beast has absolutely destroyed all the mighty herds that used to feed throughout the length and breadth of this land, ay, even a few years ago. I say it's a sin and a shame." And the old man sprang to his feet and waved his long arms about him, as he continued, "Why, from this very spot I've counted a dozen herds, with hundreds of buffalo in each. And now they are all gone; the country has been clean swept."

"What has become of them? Have they migrated?" inquired Bert, somewhat timidly, for he was awed by his uncle's excitement.

"What has become of them! Ah, that is what no man can tell. Tens of thousands have been butchered—butchered for their hides, and the carcasses left to rot on the plains, and to poison

the atmosphere. Then the poor brutes got shy and moved further away from their enemies. The herds became scattered, terrified, diseased. They dwindled—they *perished* !”

“Not altogether, I suppose ?” suggested Bert.

His uncle caught him up at once. “Yes, altogether, altogether.* They perished, I say. The buffalo is extinct. The white man—your precious immigrant, your intelligent settler—he has destroyed him. A race of puny wretches has supplanted the giant monarchs that for unknown centuries ruled over the wide prairies. They are gone ! Nought but their bones are left, stacked in heaps by the side of your C.P.R. Railway, ready to be trucked away and ground down for manure, or goodness knows what !”

* The buffalo, or bison, of North America has practically ceased to exist in a wild state. In the extreme north there lingers a smaller animal, known as the wood buffalo ; but the buffalo proper, the monarch of the prairies, is no more. The Indians sell his polished horns at Medicine Hat, and, as noted above, bones and skulls are to be seen stacked by the side of the railway ; but of the vast herds that once thundered over the plains, that wore away the rocks and cut out great road-tracks by the passing of their myriad hoofs, no representative remains. A few hundreds are kept within the vast boundaries of the American National Park, at Yellowstone, and of course there are specimens in the various zoological gardens ; but the genuine wild buffalo will be seen no more. The extraordinary rapidity with which this enormous destruction has been brought about has scarcely been accounted for. True, thousands on thousands have been wantonly slaughtered, but even five or six years ago the herds were fairly numerous. Probably disease has made havoc among the decimated survivors of the doomed species.

To our first thoughts this seems a sad result of the inroads of civilization, and of course the destruction of the buffalo in his wild state means the sweeping away of the Indians who lived upon him. But the change is inevitable ; and when one beholds thousands of beautiful English-bred cattle on the western ranching country, and herds of splendid horses round the settlers’ homes, the conviction is forced on us that there has been a real gain in return for a sentimental loss. Man works out his mission to conquer the earth and subdue it. The milch cow has ever been the mother of civilization.

The thought occurred to Cuthbert that his uncle was somewhat crazy on the extinction of the buffalo. So not wishing to provoke the old man, he judiciously gave a fresh turn to the conversation.

"You must have seen wonderful changes, sir, since you first came to the North-West. How long would it have taken to get from London to here in those days?"

To illustrate his reply, James Fairhope drew a well-worn sheath knife from his belt. "You see that knife. What do you think it was worth in Sheffield when new?"

"I am no judge, uncle," replied the lad, modestly. "It was no doubt a beautiful weapon. Perhaps it cost twelve or fifteen shillings, but I really can't say."

"Well, it didn't cost me much," said the old man; "but the skin I gave for it never sold for less than ten guineas in London. The skin took two years to get to London, and the knife was nearly three getting to the spot where we are now eating our lunch."

"And now, let me see, I suppose it would take about a fortnight," exclaimed Bert. "There would be a day from London to Liverpool, then ten in the steamer to Montreal, say four to Calgary, and one on to Edmonton. Well, it's under three weeks anyhow. How did you manage to be two or three years? What way did you come? Do tell me, uncle."

The old man smiled at the boy's eagerness. "Well, get out that railway map you are so proud of, and I'll show you. You see York Fort marked

there on the west side of Hudson's Bay, towards the south?"

"Yes," said Bert, "I see it, at the mouth of the Nelson River."

"Well, then, in the old days when that knife came out, a start was made from London in good time, so as to get into Hudson Bay as soon as ever the ice melted. But that was generally so late in the season that summer was nearly over by the time the ship got to Fort York. There the supplies were landed and stored for the winter. When the next season opened—a year about after leaving England—we were all ready for a start with the boats and canoes up the Nelson River to Lake Winnipeg. Then the head of the lake had to be crossed, and the mouth of the Saskatchewan made. There used to be no end of delays. Sometimes it was too stormy to venture on the lake, sometimes boats were sunk, sometimes they stuck in the mud, sometimes we had a battle or two to fight with Indians. In this way the open season passed, the snow began to fall, the ice gathered round, and finally the river froze up. If we were lucky we got as far as Cumberland House, which you will see marked, and made ourselves comfortable for the second winter. Other times the boats got caught by the frost, perhaps a hundred miles from any human habitation——"

"What did you do then?" interrupted Bert.

"Well, we did the best we could. We generally made everything snug for the winter, left a man or two in charge, and then tracked across the snow to the nearest fort."

"The poor fellows who were left must have had an awful time of it."

"I don't know," replied the old man. "Sometimes they had the best of it. There was plenty of food and good shelter, the only danger being from wild beasts and Indians. I once spent between five and six months all by myself, a hundred and fifty miles below Cumberland House. All that time I never saw a living thing except three bears. It was too cold for the Indians to move about."

"What on earth did you do all that time?" cried Bert, to whom the idea of living six months alone, and with nothing to do, and "nowhere to go," seemed absolutely appalling.

James Fairhope smiled. "The time passed somehow," he said quietly. "I smoked a lot, and slept a lot, and I dare say I thought a good deal. I was better off than the poor fellows who started for the fort. They lost the track, and then cold and hunger did for nearly all of them. Only two got to Cumberland House, and they were more dead than alive. Of course I knew nothing of what had happened till the relief party came down to me the following April or May."

"You've accounted for two years now, uncle."

"Yes, that would be about it. Then we'd have the summer to get the boats right up the river to Edmonton, or wherever they were bound for; so you see it was all two years and a half; and if we wanted to go further to the Athabasca, or Peace River, or Mackenzie, it meant another winter at Edmonton, since there was no use starting late in the season—not at least with heavy supplies."

"In winter you use dogs, of course. That must be awfully jolly."

"Ay, we use dogs, but I don't know about

it being jolly. It is very pretty in pictures, but the reality is horrible enough sometimes. It is different in the Esquimaux country, but about here the dogs are miserable curs quite unfit to haul, and they are treated most cruelly by the wretched half-breeds that drive them. I could tell you sad stories about some of those poor dogs."

"I always thought they enjoyed it," said Bert.

"You won't think so any more if we have to return from the Athabasca with dogs, as we may have to do if we fail to lay our hands on Jamaica Jim in good time," was the grim reply.

After this the conversation flagged. Then, having finished his meal, James Fairhope settled himself, like the old traveller that he was, to get an hour's sleep before resuming his journey. The horse also, with a wisdom that is so conspicuously absent in most members of the species, also lay down to digest his dinner and to prepare himself for the afternoon's work.

But Cuthbert could not rest. The novelty of the situation excited and enchanted him. He wandered about and examined with curiosity every object that attracted his attention. He climbed a stunted tree, and imagined himself a lost traveller anxiously surveying the horizon for a wreath of smoke or any indication of human proximity. He recalled the tales he had read of "The Pathfinder" type, and of the marvellous powers by which the Indian was enabled to follow up the trail of friend or foe. He endeavoured, with some success, to make out the route that had been traversed in the morning, and then essayed, though quite vainly,

to detect indications of a forward track. Thus the hour passed, and at its completion the old man started to his feet wide awake, and ready to resume his journey.

It would have been possible to traverse the entire distance between Edmonton and Athabasca Landing within the limits of a single day; but Mr. Fairhope had preferred for several reasons to spend a night on the road, leaving a comparatively short stage to be travelled on the following morning. The plan worked out well. The night was spent at an old Hudson Bay Company's "fort," and the great northward-flowing river was reached early the following forenoon.

At Athabasca Landing James Fairhope was delighted to find himself hot on the trail of Jamaica Jim. The man had passed through but a week previously, and had gone down the river towards the Great Slave Lake. He seemed, so the half-breeds and Indians about the landing reported, to be in fine trim, with good clothes, and plenty of cash. He professed to have thoroughly enjoyed himself while sojourning within the limits of civilization, but was no less happy in the prospect of returning, it might be for two or three years, to his remote hunting and fishing grounds.

"This man has not got the weight of a murder on his mind." Such was James Fairhope's brief comment to his nephew after he had heard all that was to be heard. "Now, if only we can overhaul friend Jim before he gets too far ahead, all will be right."

And forthwith the old gentleman began to bring all his influence and all his experience to work, so

as to secure the services of an efficient Indian crew with a swift boat. Everything was arranged with almost magical rapidity, and before the afternoon was far advanced Cuthbert experienced the novel and thrilling sensation of sweeping down the torrent-like river in a magnificent canoe, which leaped and bounded forward under the impulse given to it by the skilful and willing paddlers.





CHAPTER XXIII.

FRANK LYNTON'S DIFFICULTIES.

THE short, bright summer was passing, James Fairhope and his nephew were getting further towards the north as they paddled down the tortuous reaches of the Athabasca River. The Pixley colonists were working early and late to get their steadings and farms in order before the approach of winter. Frank Lynton was patiently investigating all the details and circumstances of the extraordinary case on which he found himself engaged.

For a while he did not make much progress. He knew that Parker would rely on an *alibi* to dissociate himself from all connection with the death of young Fergie, but of the names of the witnesses, and the points to which they would be prepared to swear, he could get no exact information. Nor could he discover anything as to Parker's antecedents. Miss Fergie only knew that he had been introduced to her brother by the agent through whom the emigration project had been negotiated.

"We understood that Mr. Parker had three or four hundred pounds to invest, so Jack went into a sort of partnership with him. The London agent said that he knew Mr. Parker's father, and that everything would be all right. As for my poor brother, he was absolutely infatuated; up to the very last he would not listen to anything against his friend."

After getting this information Lynton wrote to the "London agent," but in due time his letter was returned through the post-office. He also made inquiries of some London and Montreal firms whose names had been mentioned by Parker. But neither in this direction was there any satisfactory result. The gentlemen applied to had never heard of Mr. Parker.

But at last the persevering young lawyer got a clue which he did not let drop till the whole mystery of iniquity was exposed. A letter came from the Canterbury tailor, in which that worthy stated that in the early part of the previous summer he had made some half-dozen overcoats from a special piece of cloth, of which a pattern was enclosed and which seemed to correspond to the description given by Mr. Lynton. Of these coats, four had been made for local gentlemen, the fifth for a clergyman's son named Fairhope, and the last for young Mr. Buckthorpe, nephew of the squire of Pixley. About that last coat he was certain, because he had never been paid, young Mr. Buckthorpe having gone abroad and his uncle having repudiated the debt. As for the numbers, Mr. Fairhope's was 1108 and Mr. Buckthorpe's 1134. The fact of the two coats being cut from the same

piece of cloth did not affect the figures, which merely indicated the sequence of the garments made in the establishment.

"Now surely," said Mr. Lynton to himself as he brooded over the tailor's epistle, "we have here a coincidence so extraordinary that something as yet undiscovered must lie behind it. Is it possible that Jamaica Jim, whether guilty or innocent, could have dropped Fairhope's coat—the coat he had just won, and which Fairhope says he at once put on triumphantly, saying how well it fitted him? On the other hand, if there were two coats knocking about, and if Jim has got the garment he won of that ass Fairhope on his back at this moment, to whom does that other which the police have possession of belong? To whom could it belong but to Richard Buckthorpe? How, then, did Parker get it, for he had it when he landed at Quebec? Did Buckthorpe give it him or sell it him? What connection, if any, exists between these two men? Who is Parker, and where is Buckthorpe?"

As a first step towards an answer to these questions, Lynton sat down and wrote a line to Nellie Fergie. "Did Parker ever mention a man named Buckthorpe, and if so, in what way? What did he say about him? Did your brother know Buckthorpe?"

The reply came in course of post. "Yes, he often spoke of him, said he was a dear friend of his; that he had made a lot of money in Canada, and was heir to a great estate in Kent. I believe it was Buokthorpe's property we were ultimately to buy. Mr. B. was to have been brought to see

us, but he never appeared. Finally—after we came out—Parker told us his friend had lost the Kent property owing to his uncle having married again and had a son. And this seemed true because he showed it to us in the paper. However, Buckthorpe's misfortune and delay in making some payment to Parker was made an excuse to get several hundred pounds out of poor Jack's mother. I think it was this led to the quarrel—if there was a quarrel that day."

"My word! the plot thickens. It seems we have a brace of knaves instead of one," exclaimed Frank Lynton, as he walked up and down his room at the Alberta after reading Nellie's letter. "I should not be surprised if Buckthorpe is the dark horse in the background after all. Let's find him, and he may throw some light on Parker. They seem to be as thick as thieves, with a common purse and a common coat. I'll be off to Edmonton to-morrow morning and hear what sweet Hilda and her brothers have to say about this quondam neighbour of theirs." But there was no train on the morrow. So, as he had to wait twenty-four hours longer, Frank Lynton sought and obtained an interview with his client.

Fraser Fairhope was by this time a changed man. His character had developed and strengthened. For a time he had been furious at the false charge brought against him, and, as we have seen, he absolutely refused to take any measures to establish his innocence. But wisdom and submission had been granted to him. He was thankful for Lynton's intervention, and now followed with lively interest the measures that

were being taken for his defence. He did not feel any anxiety as to the result.

"It is this way," he would say to Lynton. "Parker as good as confessed that he did for Fergie himself. Now, I can't believe that so long as there is a God of justice ruling in the heavens, I will be permitted to perish."

"But you are accused, my friend, and the case against you looks sufficiently black," the lawyer in Frank Lynton would urge.

"That is quite a different thing. I deserve to suffer—I deserve to be suspected; I have lost my character—I have made a fool of myself. So far all that has happened but serves me right. But that is a different thing from being found guilty and hanged for another man's crime. I do not believe that a righteous God would suffer it. I even believe that if it came to the worst, Parker himself would confess."

Then Frank Lynton would cease to argue; but none the less did he resolve to leave no stone unturned in working up a defence for Hilda Fairhope's brother.

On the present occasion the lawyer found his client in excellent spirits.

"Do you know, I often wonder at you, Fairhope," he said somewhat sharply. "You seem less concerned about this matter than any of your friends are." And he felt sorely tempted to add, "And you don't seem to trouble yourself about the disgrace you have brought on them."

"I've explained to you before how I feel about it all," replied Fraser. "The one thing that does fret me is when I think of the unenviable notoriety

into which our name has been brought, and of the trouble I am giving you all. Otherwise I could find it in my heart to thank God for this imprisonment. I feel that I will come out a better man—ay, more of a real man—than I would otherwise have been.”

“Well, let that pass now,” said Lynton. “To-day I’ve come on business—to ask you a question.”

“With all my heart, old fellow,” replied Fraser.

“Well, what do you know about Richard Buckthorpe?”

“Not much—I should say not anything—to his advantage. He was a worthless scamp, and the old squire was always furious when his name was mentioned. He married again to keep him out of the property.”

“You have never heard of him in connection with this man Parker?”

“No; though now you say it, they would be nicely matched. But why are you asking me all these questions? Young Buckthorpe didn’t kill poor Fergie, did he?”

“I don’t know,” said Lynton, dryly; “but I know that was Buckthorpe’s coat you fished out of the water at Quebec. It is the same coat that is in the hands of the police to-day, though unfortunately we can no longer make out the number. Now, the question is, How did Parker become possessed of that coat?”

“Stole it, perhaps. But, I say, how do you know all this?” said Fraser.

Frank Lynton briefly explained. Then he asked sharply, “Have you ever seen Buckthorpe? Would you know him?”

"I may have seen him as a boy, but I certainly would not know him. He was hardly ever at Pixley in my time."

"Have you ever heard what he was like? Could you describe him?"

"They say he was rather good-looking," began Fraser, languidly. Then suddenly recollecting something, he added, "But I had forgotten. Don can tell you all about him. They had an interesting encounter one morning shortly before I left."

Then he told the tale which the reader already knows, and to which Frank Lynton now listened with interest. The next question came somewhat awkwardly.

"Did your sister, did Miss Fairhope, know the man?"

The answer was returned quite positively. "Certainly not. Our father would not have let the fellow near the rectory. And even if he were sneaking about the place he would not have liked any of us to recognize him."

The time allotted for the interview having now elapsed, Lynton rose to go.

"I'm off to Edmonton in the morning," he said; "have you any message for your brother or for your sister?"

"Only to give them both my fondest love, and to say I am looking forward to the happy day when we shall all be reunited. Tell Don that he must try to come and see me again once at least before—before the trial. Tell them I know I have been an awful fool, but that, please God, I will make it up to them by-and-by."

It was late the following evening when Mr.

Lynton arrived at Fairhope, so that all serious conversation was postponed till the next morning. When morning came it brought a summons for Donald to a distant part of the farm ; so Frank Lynton, finding himself alone with Hilda, thought himself fully justified in further postponing business considerations.

"I am afraid you find this rather a hard sort of life," he said, as he looked wistfully into the girl's sad face.

He was a keen observer, and he failed not to notice that a change had taken place in Hilda. She looked distraught, and even irritable. He could not understand it. Not knowing her secret, he misread her symptoms. He said to himself that alike in its work and its idleness, in its strain and its monotony, her present mode of life was trying the girl to the very limit of her endurance. It had often occurred to him that the women in the North-West appeared dull and sad, in strong contrast to the men, who were for the most part alert and hopeful. But Hilda, not knowing how he was reasoning in his anxious mind, was surprised and somewhat annoyed at the suggestion. She answered with decision—

"Oh dear, no ; the life is not hard at all. Everything is done to make me comfortable."

"I am sure of that," he replied ; "I could not imagine it being anything but a pride and a pleasure to each and every member of this little community to do what they could for your ease and happiness. But the conditions of pioneer life are essentially rough. You must miss a hundred conveniences ; you must miss society ; you must

miss—well, I was going to say you must miss civilization.”

There was something like anger in her glance as she answered promptly, “You forget, Mr. Lynton, that we are not quite barbarians here. I have my brother, who has actually been at school; and most of the people here can read and write. Anyhow, I have known them all my life, and have lived among them. Must I confess I am country-bred myself?”

He was hurt by her scornful manner, but the love and yearning tenderness of his heart absorbed all weaker currents of impulse.

“I am sorry if I have unwittingly annoyed you, Miss Fairhope,” he said quietly; “but I only sought to account for the expression of weariness and distress that I saw upon your face. You are not fretting yourself unduly about your brother’s trouble, I hope?”

“No, indeed!” she exclaimed eagerly. “I do not allow myself to fret; I know what good hands he is in.”

Frank Lynton made no effort to conceal the pleasure that he felt. “I am glad you can trust me, dear Miss Fairhope, so far as your brother’s interests are concerned. I only wish I had the right to ask you to trust me further. You are troubled and perplexed about something. Will you not let me try and help you? I have established no claim upon you, but at least you believe in the sincerity of my desire to serve you.”

Hilda felt her heart beat wildly. She longed to tell him everything. Frightened by Buckthorpe’s threats, she would gladly have trusted herself to

the guidance of this grave, strong gentleman. Yet, to him of all people in the world, she could not endure to tell the story of her old folly and infatuation. She could not bring herself to tell the whole—and half the truth she would not speak. If he knew anything he must know all. There was an awkward pause. The girl's distressed and pleading face bespoke her embarrassment and claimed his pity.

"You do believe that I would gladly serve you in any way?" he said softly.

"Yes; indeed, I know you would," she cried, the tears springing to her eyes; "and if I hesitate to tell you about anything that is bothering me just now, you will believe it is from no want of confidence in you, in your kindness or your judgment. But there are some things it is hard to speak of, things that involve a lot of explanation." She stopped abruptly, and somehow her embarrassment and the blushes that overspread her cheeks were as sweet to him as though she had told him all her heart. For the present he scarce wished for more. So he turned the conversation into another channel as he thought—little knowing.

"Well, I will not press you now," he said brightly, "only you must promise not to look so worried and anxious in future. Perhaps, as Don shows no signs of reappearing, I had better get to business, and explain why I have dropped down upon you in this sudden fashion."

"Do you need to explain? You certainly do not need to apologize."

He looked his gratitude, but took no verbal notice of the interruption, as he continued—

"The fact is, I want to find out something about an old neighbour of your's. Fraser says *you* could not know him—but that your brother Donald had met him."

"A neighbour! Who? Where?" exclaimed Hilda, eagerly.

"Oh, in your old home. Your squire had a nephew, I understand—Richard Buckthorpe; he is the man I want to find out about. But I say, Miss Fairhope—Hilda, what is the matter? Are you ill? Have I said anything wrong?"

She stood before him pale and statue-like. The bright smiles with which she had sought to reward his gentleness and forbearance were instantaneously scared away. She stared before her, as though her eyes were fixed on some horrid spectre that none else could see. She breathed hard, and when he put out his hand fearing lest she should fall, she shrank back, murmuring—

"No, no. Don't touch me. You must not touch me."

"I entreat you to tell me what this means. Much may depend on it. You are frightened. Will you not trust me? You know, Hilda, that I—I——"

"Hush!" she whispered. Then she continued firmly, "I will tell you all I know. What is it you wish to find out?"

"Well," said Lynton, with some embarrassment, for her strange manner almost frightened him, "it's this way. Buckthorpe seems to be mixed up somehow with Parker. They were friends or partners in villainy. In fact, I have discovered that the coat that Parker had with him was originally made for Buckthorpe."

"Yes, they are friends—partners in villainy," and perhaps as the words escaped her she was scarce conscious that she spoke aloud.

"You know that, of your own knowledge?" cried the lawyer, sharply, the cross-examining impulse momentarily getting the better of every other feeling.

"Yes. He told me so."

"*He*, Buckthorpe? Why, your brother Fraser said you did not know him—had not seen him since you were a child."

"Fraser is mistaken. I do know Mr. Richard Buckthorpe, to my cost."

Heedless now of everything save truth, the lawyer continued—

"Ah! And you knowing this man Buckthorpe, he spoke to you of Parker as his friend. That must have been some time ago—before you left England?"

"No; it was at Edmonton, a couple of months ago," admitted the witness.

"Then the fellow is in the country—hanging around, watching the proceedings. Now, Miss Fairhope," and the lawyer's voice became hard and cold, "I have no right to question you as to the nature or ground of this intimacy, of which your brother had absolutely no suspicion; but, as that brother's legal adviser, I may be allowed to press for information on points wherein his honour, it may be his life, is involved."

Feeling miserable and humiliated, she could merely nod assent.

"I presume, then, that this interview was of Buckthorpe's seeking, and that, in part at least,

it had reference to the charge against your brother?"

A flash of angry colour came back to the pale cheek, as she replied—

"Of course it was *all* about poor Fraser. The man forced himself upon me—he threatened me."

"He forced himself on you, he threatened you, he acknowledged his connection with Parker, and yet you have remained silent all this time. You have withheld facts that may be of vital importance, on which your brother's life may depend." He spoke with the vehemence of an advocate; but he was speedily checked by Hilda's pleading response.

"Have pity, Mr. Lynton, have pity. I was frightened; I did not know what to do. I did not see how my telling or not could affect the issue."

"But you say he threatened you?"

"Yes. He said there were circumstances about Mr. Fergie's death that Parker could explain; that if Parker came forward Fraser would be cleared; that he could compel him to come forward."

"But where does the threat come in? And why should Mr. Buckthorpe, an old neighbour and acquaintance, not be eager to secure your brother's acquittal?"

Hilda Fairhope looked appealingly into her questioner's face.

"Do not ask me that, Mr. Lynton; do not ask me that. He is a very wicked man. But I did not always know that. I was a foolish girl, and now he dares——"

Frank Lynton took the cold, trembling hands in his.

"Miss Fairhope, please say nothing more, if

so be you have said all that directly concerns your brother's welfare. You may leave me to deal with this villainy—and with the villains. Here comes Donald. He will tell me anything else I want to know. Ah, just one question more—you have never seen Mr. Parker, have you?"

"No, I have not, though they said he was in Calgary more than once when we were there. But, Mr. Lynton, I have a favour to ask. You will not say anything to my brothers about what I have told you—I mean about my knowing and having seen Richard Buckthorpe."

"It may have to come out in court," he said gravely.

"That is different," she answered; "but I mean not just now—not at present."

"Very well; but I do not like being the depository of secrets of this sort. They ought not to exist."

She accepted the somewhat sternly uttered rebuke meekly enough, only she added as her brother rode up—

"And you will not hate or despise me, Mr. Lynton?"

"Could I, even if I would, do you think?" he replied quickly. Then he turned to speak to Donald.





CHAPTER XXIV.

OLD FACES IN NEW SCENES.

AMONG the most valuable settlers in the great North-West are those who come from the older parts of Canada, such as Ontario, or even across the border from the United States. These men have no Old World traditions to unlearn. They are already accustomed to and have been trained from childhood in the rough-and-ready methods which must to some extent prevail in a new country. They understand the climate, and they readily come to understand the soil. The conditions of the life are not alien to them, nor do its hardships and drawbacks differ materially from those amid which they—and those who went before them—have been nurtured.

And this flow of what we may call inland migration is ever going steadily on, ever moving westward into the open from the more confined and settled lands. In some cases the farmer is seeking to better himself. His land has become exhausted, or its limits too restricted for the requirements of a family that would fain not be separated. In

some cases mere love of change, the desire to "try one's luck," is the moving impulse; in others it is the pioneer instinct that forces so many men, especially of the Anglo-Saxon race, forward in search of wider horizons and more extended fields of enterprise.

Among the sturdy Ontario farmers whose attention had been drawn to the vast fields of enterprise opened up by the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway was Matthew Burrows, beneath whose kindly, hospitable roof poor Esther Marsh had found a second home. This man was comfortably off and childless; there was therefore no necessity laid upon him to seek a new home at fifty years of age. But the great West laid its spell upon him, and he could no longer rest. He must see the "league-long" wheat-fields of Manitoba, the park-like ranches of Alberta, and the undulating farmlands of the Saskatchewan. The instinct of migration was kindled in the man's silent breast; he longed to be up and doing, carrying on the conqueror's work—the abiding conqueror whose victories are wrought with ploughshare rather than with sword and spear.

After having had a good look round, Matthew Burrows determined to take up land in the neighbourhood of the old-established Roman Catholic Mission station at St. Albert, some nine miles from Edmonton. His arrangements were promptly completed, and then he hastened back to Ontario to fetch his wife and Esther, and such chattel property as it seemed worth while to remove over so great a distance. All this had taken place just about the time when the Fairhopes were

proudly giving a name to their newly established community.

Once settled in his new abode, Edmonton had not much attraction for Matthew Burrows. But the day came when a barrel of oil had to be called for at the dépôt. Thither accordingly Mr. Burrows went, and thither Esther was taken with kindly attention, so that she might have a glimpse of the great outer world of men and things; at least she would see the locomotive that was nearer to the North Pole than any other in the Western Hemisphere!

So, as the train came in from Calgary, Esther stood looking idly about her. And as she looked she thought of the old Kent home five thousand miles away, and of how, long ago, she had stood watching the first train that had ever drawn up at the little roadside station in the valley that worked its sinuous course at the foot of the High Pixley uplands.

"I be blowed if it bean't Esther Marsh!"

The words startled her from her reverie. She looked up, and there, with open mouth and blinking eyes, stood George Page—the very George who had stood beside her on the memorable day when all Pixley had gone down the hill to stare at that first locomotive that had come puffing and whistling into the hitherto silent valley.

Esther started, and for a moment she was conscious of a strong inclination to run away and hide herself. Then the past of years ago came back. Time as well as space shrank into nothingness, and it seemed the most natural thing in the world that George Page should be standing there

open-mouthed and blinking at her in the old boyish fashion.

"My! you did start me; but it's glad I am to see you, George;" and she held out her hand to him frankly.

"So it's out here I've stumbled on thee, Esther; and you allow that you are glad to see me;" and he took the proffered hand gently and thoughtfully.

"What has brought you here, George? How strange it is that we should meet like this, after all these sorrowful years!" And as she looked round, the thoughts of time and place rushing in once more made her shy. She would willingly have unclasped her hands from his.

"It is not so strange either, when you come to think of it," he replied. "I came to this country in the hope to find thee some day, though of course I couldn't say if it would be sooner or later."

She gave him a quick, grateful glance, but only said, "Then, are you settled in these parts, and did you come out by yourself?"

The answer to this question involved a brief narrative of the "Fairhope Venture;" that is, Mr. Page desired to be brief, but in his very anxiety to achieve that end he became involved in various "sidings" and explanations which were easier to get into than out of. But Esther did not weary. She would gladly have stood there all night drinking in each detail and finding sweet nectar for her thirsty, homesick soul in the very sound of the old familiar names of people and places.

While George Page was thus floundering through

his narrative, Mr. Burrows, having claimed his petroleum, came to look after Esther.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, "I guess you've struck on a friend, and it seems too he has got a big consignment of intelligence to unload;" and the Ontario man laughed heartily as the pair, startled by his general salutation, turned quickly round.

"Yes, an old friend indeed. We knew each other as children in the old home. Just fancy, Mr. Burrows; quite a crowd has come out from the parish where I was born to take up land near here. This is George Page."

"Glad to meet you, sir. I hope you'll find this country to your taste," said Burrows, as he grasped the young man's hand.

"It is a splendid country: and we are all right-down contented and happy. We none of us want to go back, you bet," responded George.

A few inquiries as to the exact location and character of the Fairhope settlement, and then Mr. Burrows said laughingly—

"Well, sir, I wish you and your people God-speed; but mind, I won't have any of you young fellows coming around with intent to take Esther Marsh away from me and my old lady. We couldn't live without her—that's a fact."

"There is none of us would wish to do such a thing," exclaimed George. Then he stopped, stammered, and added, "That is, it wouldn't be right or fair—so long as she is your—your——"

Poor fellow! Probably he had never looked between the covers of *Punch*, but he felt keenly enough that he had blundered on one of those things that would "have been better left unsaid."

Esther Marsh coloured with shame or anger, or both. Then George said humbly—

“But you’ll try and come over to Fairhope some day, Miss Marsh. There is none but would be glad to see you, and I know Miss Hilda——”

“I should like to meet Miss Hilda, but I do not think I should like to go to Fairhope,” said Esther, slowly.

“Well, now, of course I was only having a bit of fun,” remonstrated the farmer, completely puzzled by Esther’s seriousness. “You know you are welcome to see your friends as often as you like, and they are no less welcome to come and see you. Why, my lass, haven’t I been as a father to you this many a year? The old lady and I may be wrapped up in you a bit, but we are not selfish; and God forbid that we should try to come between you and them that have the old-time claims upon you.”

“Indeed, I know all that, Mr. Burrows,” cried Esther, warmly. “You have been more than kind to me, and I do not believe anything would ever induce me to leave you.”

“Well, well, it’s pleasant to hear that anyway. Yet I wouldn’t like you to feel yourself bound to us—no, not for an hour, where your own happiness was concerned. But now I’ll go and harness up, and you can meet me over at the depôt when you see me come. Good-bye, my friend. I hope we may come across each other often again;” and so, after another vice-like grip of George’s hand, he turned away towards the hotel.

“I am sorry I said that just now, Esther. You know I didn’t mean it; but it was like my awkwardness.”

"I don't know as I took notice to what you said ; leastways there is no need to say anything," replied Esther, with affected carelessness. "But I wish you'd tell dear Miss Hilda how I long to see her, and to hear from her own lips about—about poor mother."

"I wouldn't have thought," replied George, who was perhaps a little jealous, "as how you'd have remembered Miss Fairhope. She was but a child when—when you went away."

"I mind her rightly," was the quick response ; "besides, mother has always gone on about her in the letters she has sent me. I feel as if I knew her quite well. Did you see mother, George, before you left Pixley?"

The young fellow nodded, but did not speak.

"How was she seeming, George, and what did she say to you?"

"She was low enough, poor soul, and not like as if she was long for this world. She sent for me, after Miss Hilda had been with her, to say good-bye. She told me where you lived, and said that if ever I chanced to meet you I was to say, that she said—that she wished—" he stammered, and then added frankly, "I'd rather not tell you that part just yet—not to-night. It is enough for one day to have met you, and to have held your hand in mine, Esther."

"I must be going now," she said. "I see Mr. Burrows leading out his horse."

"Just a minute," pleaded the young man. "There is one thing I'd like we came to an understanding about. Is it to be like it used to be between us? Will you forget the past?"

"Can you forgive the past?" she asked in a faltering voice.

"Forgive! why, what's to forgive? Your mother explained as how it was all a sort of mistake—a piece of foolishness."

"George, it is good of you to say that. But I am not the Esther you used to know. I've gone through a great deal. I feel hard and old, and different altogether somehow."

"Hush, sweetheart! You are the same Esther to me you always were," he whispered. "Why, I've never quit thinking of you all these years, and it just seems now as though we were standing by the old gate at Pixley Lane End."

"See," said Esther, "there is Mr. Burrows beckoning with his whip. I must go. Good-bye."

"But about seeing you again?" he gasped.

"Oh, tell Miss Hilda to write and settle something. A line to 'care of Mr. Burrows, near St. Albert,' will be all right. She'll be in Edmonton sometimes, I suppose—and then I could try and come the same day."

"I might drive her up if her brother was too busy?" suggested George, innocently.

"Yes, that would do nicely. Good-bye." Then she ran across the open space to where Mr. Burrows was standing by his horse's head—ran with lighter foot and more gladsome heart than had been hers for many a day.





CHAPTER XXV.

IN SWIFT PURSUIT.

AND how, all this time, was Bert Fairhope prospering on his journey, in the direction of the North Pole, with his uncle? Had the impetuous youth himself had opportunity to answer, he would certainly have said that he was having "a high old time." This was on the canoe journey from the landing down to Lake Athabasca, in whose waters the river loses its distinctive appellation. It was glorious work. The weather was fine and mild; the scenery magnificent; the current lively, but not too perilously swift. At every stopping-place the name of James Fairhope was sufficient to secure a welcome and abundant offers of assistance. There was not a half-bred trapper, dog-driver, *voyageur*, or loafer who did not know the old man; and with the Indians, one and all, he seemed on the friendliest and most familiar terms.

Athabasca Lake is a sheet of water that anywhere else but in the Dominion would be considered big. It is two hundred miles from east to west, by thirty-five broad from south to north.

The northern shore of the lake is rocky and precipitous, and Bert, who was beginning to find the river voyage monotonous, was delighted when he saw the great hills rising in front of him, clad almost to their summits with pine and poplar.

But while Bert was admiring the view, and looking forward to a day's fishing in the prolific waters of the lake, James Fairhope was preoccupied with serious calculations. The season was getting on, and though the voyage down the river seemed rapid enough, considerable time had been lost, partly in waiting for supplies, partly in pursuing what proved to be futile trails in search of Jamaica Jim. It was one thing, the old traveller knew very well, to go skipping and gliding down the stream towards the close of a lovely summer; it might prove quite another thing to make the return journey two or three months later.

At the lake a bitter disappointment awaited the travellers. The man of whom they were in such eager quest had been there but a week before. He had been fishing for several days with the Indians, and had then gone away to the north. There being no doubt about the authenticity of this information, there was nothing for it but to hurry on through one of the many channels by which the waters of the lake find access to the Slave River. This was safely accomplished, and as night closed in the voyagers were glad to find rest and shelter at Chipewyan Fort, one of those monuments to the genius and energy of the Hudson Bay Company, which are scattered here and there throughout the vast territory

over which, at one time, they exercised undisputed sway.

Within the stockaded enclosure, dignified with the name of fort, James Fairhope was among old friends; he was also in old quarters, since he had represented the Company in that region for several years. Gladly would the veteran campaigner—a campaigner against Nature in her sternest moods and most repellant aspects—have rested a few days among old associates, amid whom he might “fight all his battles o’er again,” narrating or listening to wondrous tales of mighty hunts, and perilous voyages, and tremendous drives; tales of moose and dog and Indian; stories of hunger, cold, and nakedness; and some of cruelty and violence wrought by man against his fellow-man. But of this last class there were not many, for in those latitudes the fight with nature is too stern to permit of internecine strife, and the instinct of self-preservation compels men to hold together.

But for the present the idea of rest was not to be entertained. There was work to be done, game to be run to earth; and that being so, James Fairhope was the last man on earth to take his ease, stretch his legs, smoke his pipe, and tell his tale. That might be by-and-by—on the return journey perhaps, but certainly not now. No, certainly not now; and that, even though the old man felt that a few days’ rest would be most invigorating to a frame on which the hardships of years had at length begun to tell. At Chipe-wyan Fort it was ascertained that Jamaica Jim was only three days in advance. The man was described as being in excellent health and spirits,

sober, well clothed, and fit for any enterprise. He had stayed in the neighbourhood of the fort, which is situated at the junction of the Peace and Slave rivers, for a couple of days. His original idea had been to proceed down to Fort Resolution on the Great Slave Lake; but for some reason he had changed his mind, and had finally started up the Peace River in the direction of Fort Vermillion. He was accompanied in a large canoe by the members of an Indian family with which he had allied himself by marriage, and among whom he proposed to spend the summer. The canoe being thus apparently somewhat of the nature of a "house-boat," Mr. Fairhope expected that he would be able to overhaul it in a comparatively short time. It was necessary, however, to make an immediate start.

Cuthbert Fairhope could never forget the morning when the start was made from Fort Chipewyan. It was at earliest dawn; but with the dawn there came the promise of a glorious day. True, there was a touch of autumn in the air, but the leaves were still on the trees, and the great river flowed merrily down its gorge, as though in good-humoured sport of the tiny craft that was about to essay the task of stemming its tide.

The half-dozen white men that resided in the neighbourhood, including the Company's chief factor and a Church of England missionary, assembled to see the little party start and to encourage them with a hearty British cheer. Not that Bert stood in need of encouragement. He was in the wildest of spirits, and ran down eagerly to the shore, so as to be the first to embark.

James Fairhope followed with a deliberation that had characterized him for many years, but with a langour that was quite new to him.

"Good-bye, old friend," said the missionary when the final preparations were complete. "God be with you. And take care of yourself, for you know neither you nor I are as young as we once were." This was a kindly way of putting it; for though the missionary's hair was streaked with silver, it was the result rather of a hard life than of the lapse of time. At any rate, he was a dozen years younger than James Fairhope.

The old man grasped the hand that was extended to him, and held it tight for a few moments.

"You will have me in your prayers, sir; and it maybe I will need them. Somehow I feel as though this trip was like to be my last. I wouldn't mind if it were not for the boy; but having brought him so far, I'd like to see him safe put through."

"Come, come, Mr. Fairhope, you must not be despondent. You are a bit out of sorts this morning; but remember you are engaged in a good and noble task, and trust to God to bring you safe."

"Ay, I'll trust Him; but——" and the finish of the sentence was cut off by a merry shout from Bert—

"Now then, skipper, all is ready. Come aboard, and give the word to be off. I bet we run down Jamaica Jim and his travelling menagerie before this time to-morrow morning."

Five minutes later the canoe—the same that

had borne them from Athabasca Landing—was being skilfully and silently propelled through the backwaters that lay between the successive points of rock that jutted out into the main current of the rushing stream.

"I don't quite like the looks of our old boss ; he looks like a gone man," said the clerk to the missionary, as they went into the fort for breakfast.

"Oh, I trust he will be all right. Perhaps he has overtaxed his strength a little. He is one of those fellows who never know when they ought to give in," was the cheerful response.

"Ah, that is just what some of us say about other fellows who won't take a holiday home to England when they ought," said the clerk, significantly.

"Never fear, that will all come in good time ; but we must work while it is the day."

"And we can't do the day's work without a good breakfast—eh?" put in the factor, who, coming up at the moment, had caught the clergyman's last words.

Throughout that day the voyagers prospered. From time to time when the river had to be crossed, or some point of rock turned, the paddlers had hard work ; but the men thoroughly understood their business, and every danger was safely overcome. More than once, indeed, Bert held his breath and set his teeth as the frail craft, compelled to venture out into mid-stream, was caught on the crest of a boiling wave and whirled downward through the rushing eddies. There are places on those rivers where it is said, that if a

boat should be capsized, neither it nor aught that it might contain is ever seen again. But no mishap occurred, and as darkness fell upon the river, the canoe was drawn to shore on a sheltered, shelving beach. The fire was kindled, the evening meal prepared, and an hour later the little camp was wrapped in slumber.

Next morning a change of weather seemed imminent. The first frost of the season had struck rudely down upon the land, and several of the weary sleepers were wakened before daylight by the sudden cold. The sun rose in a red and cloudy sky. The wind had shifted, and was now blowing in sharp, bitter squalls right down the river, adding its strength and spite to that of the current, so as to render all upward progress slow and exhausting. Stiffly and in silence James Fairhope took his place in the boat. Bert forbore to cheer, and his lips were too cold to mould themselves to their wonted whistle.

Nor did matters improve as the day wore on. The sky became more and more overclouded; each successive squall seemed to blow sharper and colder than the predecessor that had fled before it; at each bend of the river the current certainly augmented in force and volume. This last indisputable fact the Indian pilot accounted for by the supposition that a storm of rain had broken over the river somewhere higher up during the previous night.

Evening was at hand. There still remained some hours of daylight, but the men were so utterly exhausted by their labours that Mr. Fairhope had reluctantly given orders to draw

inshore and to camp for the night at the first spot that appeared suitable. All eyes were now fixed on the bank, and soon a little cove, sheltered by trees that ran down to the water's edge, appeared in front. This was just the ideal place for a camp on such a night ; but in order to reach it, a point of rock that jutted nearly half across the river had to be rounded. As the canoe approached this barrier the roar and rush of the water off the extreme point became terrible to ear and eye. The pilot hesitated and consulted Mr. Fairhope.

"The safest thing to do," said the old man, "would be to let the canoe drift across the river, then paddle up the other side and drop down from above the point. It would take us over an hour, though, and the men are weary."

The Indian leant forward and spoke in quick undertones with his crew.

"They say they will fight the battle now ; now they are strong, in an hour they will be weak."

James Fairhope nodded. "So let it be," he said.

Then silently they plunged into the thick of the awful struggle. Bert had read in some of his favourite books the phrase, "a hell of waters ;" it had sounded a fine expression, but not till now had he understood what it might mean. No sooner had the bow of the canoe been allowed to drift forward beyond the sheltering reef, than it was caught as it were by some invisible giant hand, lifted clean into the air, spun round, and then dashed down scornfully on a seething, eddying, bubbling, slipping, foaming, raging wilderness of waters. Every-

thing seemed to spin round and be moving in every direction at the same moment. The river sloped visibly, like the roof of a house, and every here and there great rocks were left bare or momentarily overwhelmed by the swirling, wreathing, dancing tide. But when the lad, astonished and awe-struck rather than frightened at the novel situation, withdrew his eyes a moment from the river to let them rest on the faces of the men who were with him in the boat, he beheld no sign of hurry or confusion, only set features and straining muscles, each man working for bare life, but working with the steadiness of a machine, and absolutely controlled by the slightest motion of the pilot's hand. The struggle was brief as it was fierce. A moment the canoe seemed to hang motionless in the air. It had ceased to be at the mercy of the stream as the baffled waves rushing by on either side sufficiently indicated. Then there was another critical moment—a quivering pause—and, as a bolt delivered from some great machine, the canoe leaped forward like a living thing into the slack water beyond the point.

The danger was over; the battle was won. Then came the reaction, and the catastrophe. Some careless movement, some false stroke, or, as it was afterwards stated, the grazing of a hidden rock, and every man was struggling in the water, while the overturned canoe rushed madly forth into the eddying current from which strong arms had rescued it but a minute before.

Fortunately the water was shallow, and no one had any difficulty in gaining the shore. But

they were wet and shivering, and the canoe with all their supplies was gone.

"The boat must be recovered," cried James Fairhope as soon as he was able to speak. "Take your best men with you, pilot, and do not lose a moment."

"I am old, but they are swift, and will outrun the river," replied the Indian. Then, with half a dozen words and a few imperious gesticulations, he made his selection.

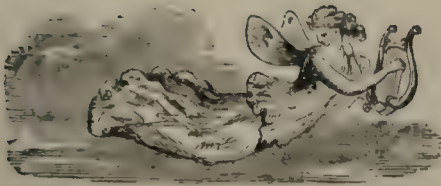
In a minute three half-breeds and a couple of Indians were scrambling up the banks, which fortunately were not very steep at the spot where the accident occurred. They hoped by making a short cut to capture the canoe at the next great bend in the river.

"Now, boys," said Fairhope, as soon as the party detached for the recovery of the canoe had disappeared, "let us make the best of this bad job. Hurry round with your knives and cut some firewood; we'll be able to get a light from my old flint, or I am mistaken. Take off your clothes, Bert, and wring them as dry as you can. I've a drop of whisky in my flask here will give a lift to those who need it most."

So the old man spoke cheerfully, and so, entirely forgetful of self, he encouraged and directed those around him. After some time they providentially succeeded in lighting a fire, and soon the genial warmth brought back vitality and hope to the half-perished sufferers.

The next thing was to try and get some supper. And this was supplied by the ingenuity of the Indians, who, as soon as it became nearly dark,

managed to spear several fish with their knives. Thus a sufficiently satisfying meal was provided. Then, having heaped up their fire and set a watch, they threw themselves on the ground and slept the sleep of utter exhaustion.





CHAPTER XXVI.

WAS IT SACRILEGE?

JAMES FAIRHOPE could not sleep. The fatigue and hardship to which he had been exposed, added to the chill of the previous night, had begun to tell upon him. His joints were stiff and painful, his head ached, his mind was confused, and his spirit oppressed with unwonted fears. At the first streak of daylight he rose from the ground and began to wander about disconsolately. While scarcely able to grasp the significance of yesterday's events, his mind was abnormally clear as to the past. Long-forgotten scenes and incidents of youth and early manhood came back to memory with startling vividness, ghosts out of the dead past rose unbidden and walked beside him, voices long since silenced in death whispered to him in threatening or remonstrant tones.

Yet while the old man was thus the victim of bodily infirmity and mental hallucination, the keen physical instincts that had been developed and refined through years of adventurous toil, were far

from being destroyed. Eye and ear were both on the alert, and almost simultaneously did they ring their electric message to the brain. As James Fairhope listlessly climbed to the crest of the hillock that separated the hollow in which the camp had been pitched from the next turn of the river, a thin wreath of ascending smoke attracted his attention, while a low wailing sound seemed to quiver through the air.

In an instant the man was his old self again. There was no indication of age or fatigue in the action with which he dropped down behind a jutting rock so as to be sheltered from view while he made his own rapid observations. The result seemed to be reassuring, for in less than a minute the old man rose and descended the hill towards a solitary Indian tent that was pitched on a little plateau above the river, and from the open roof of which the thin wreath of smoke was curling upward into the morning air.

James Fairhope knew that the wailing sound, that became more distinct as he approached the solitary tent, was a song of lamentation for the dead. He was therefore prepared for the scene that met his view on entering, and when he entered it was with the usual words of condolence on his lips. An old decrepit Indian man was sitting on one side of the fire, while on the other three women were huddled together as they sang their chant in doleful unison. Regardless of their elders, two healthy children were playing together by the entrance.

Having introduced himself in what he knew to be the orthodox fashion, Mr. Fairhope glanced

round in expectation of seeing the dead body. Evidently the old Indian understood his visitor's look of surprise, for he burst out into a sudden wail of lamentation.

"Look not for him there. We shall see him no more. He is gone. The wicked water spirit hath devoured him. My brother! my son! There is none left to hunt for the old man now. The women will be hungry, the children will cry, but he will not return. His father was a pale-face, but his mother was the-daughter of the Starving Bull. And was he not the husband of Brown Bear's child?"

At this question one of the women, the fairest and youngest, doubtless in acknowledgment of the reference made to herself as Brown Bear's child, lifted up her voice in a keen so shrill that the little ones came running to her side in alarm.

The Indian family, having sufficiently ventilated their grief, were quite ready to tell the story of their troubles. It seems they had been making their way up the river, and had pitched their tent for the night in the spot where it was still standing. Then Brown Bear's son-in-law had moved out the canoe for the purpose of bringing it to a more convenient mooring-place. While turning a point of rock where the current ran swiftly against him, the pole on which he leant had snapped in two, and both man and boat were instantly swept away to destruction. This had happened early the previous day, and the bereaved family, absolutely careless as to their own condition, had remained mourning their dead by the scene of the accident.

"Was this the man they called Jamaica Jim,

the half-breed from Red Deer?" inquired Mr. Fairhope, eagerly.

The Indians assented, though for themselves repudiating the barbarous name.

"I have followed this man from afar—from the plains of the Rising Sun, from beyond the Athabasca River, from beyond Edmonton and Red Deer, I have followed on his track."

"He knew not that any man sought to speak with him. He had no need to fly the face of any man," said the Indian widow, with a certain native dignity.

James Fairhope assented. He explained that he had sought speech with Jim, knowing that he was one who would rejoice to aid the cause of justice, and to defend the weak. In fact, the old diplomatist "piled it up" as though Jim had been a distinguished philanthropist, whose name was familiar to the oppressed throughout the entire North-West. Meanwhile, the speaker's eye looked keenly about, till at last it rested on the object of his search.

"Ah, that is his coat—the coat that a foolish boy sold to him," he said with affected carelessness, as he stooped to handle a somewhat tattered garment with which the children had been playing.

But well as Mr. Fairhope played his part, the anxiety underlying his careless manner did not escape the quick intelligence of Brown Bear's daughter. She took the coat from the children, and drew it to herself as though it were a charm or something sacred.

"It belonged to him, and our love for him was very great," she murmured with touching simplicity.

Mr. Fairhope could scarce forbear laughing as he recalled the fashion in which the two children had been tearing and trampling the relic of their dead father but a minute before. He controlled himself, however, and said carelessly—

“Well, it is of more value to you than to any one else. The boy who sold it is in my camp now; but I don’t suppose he’d give a dollar for the old rag.”

Mr. Fairhope, after a little further conversation, hurried back to tell the news, such as it was, to Bert, and to consult what might be the best steps to take in order to secure the precious coat. His appearance coming over the crest of the hill was hailed with a shout, and before he could get to the bottom of the rocks, Bert met him with the joyous intelligence that the canoe had been recovered. The paddles, indeed, were gone, and all the stores lost or damaged; but the tough, well-built canoe was still intact, and apparently none the worse for a rough-and-tumble voyage of a couple of miles down the river.

It was now that Brown Bear, poor and helpless as his condition seemed, was able to give invaluable help. Though his boat was lost, and his son-in-law drowned, the paddles, having been fortunately thrown ashore when the passengers disembarked, were safe. But though Brown Bear was willing to sell his paddles at a fair price, his daughter professed great reluctance to part with the souvenir that poor Jim had brought back from his last trip within the limits of a distant and mysterious civilization. Mr. Fairhope wisely desisted from bargaining for the present, and devoted himself to

urging the old Indian and his family to seize the opportunity presented them to return to Fort Chipewyan. But even this was a matter of some difficulty, and it was not till late in the afternoon that the whole party got away from the spot that had proved so disastrous. The tent was left standing, as though to afford shelter to the spirit of poor drowned Jamaica Jim. Some food was placed upon the floor, certain mystic rites were celebrated, and then the women, with their bundles and the two children, came down slowly and sadly towards the boat.

The heavily laden craft was just being cautiously pushed out into mid-stream, when old James Fairhope gave a loud exclamation—

“As I’m a living man,” he cried, “I have left my big knife stuck in a tree at our camping-place. Will you go back for it, Bert my boy, and catch us up at the bend of the river where the canoe was stranded?”

Now, Bert could have sworn that he had seen that identical knife in his uncle’s belt after they left the camp. He was about to say so, when something in the old gentleman’s countenance, and something like a lightning wink of one glittering eye, arrested him.

“Yes, sir, I’ll go back with pleasure. I think I know the spot where you left it.”

Not without some grumbling, the Indian pilot put the canoe back to shore. Then, as Bert stood by his uncle, ready to spring on the rocks, he felt something pushed into his pocket, and caught the words, “*Search the tent.*” Next instant he stood alone on the river-bank, and the canoe had

already drifted many yards downward on the current.

So long as he could be observed, Bert ran along the shore in the direction of the camp; but as soon as the canoe was out of sight he stopped and burst out laughing. Thrushing his hand into his pocket, he found, as he had anticipated, his uncle's knife safely deposited there. Then he altered his course, and began to climb the rocks swiftly towards the solitary tent.

"What can the old coon be up to now, I wonder? What can he want me to search the tent for? It looks an uncanny place to enter. How would it be if I were to find the corpse of Jamaica Jim stretched on the floor?"

It was, in truth, a lonely, desolate spot. No living thing was in sight, no sound was to be heard save the cruel rush of the murderous river far below. The fire had been raked out, and no smoke ascended through the blackened aperture where the supporting sticks crossed each other at the top of the tent. The entrance had been hurriedly closed, and now the loose canvas flaps were being buffeted backwards and forwards in the wind. It seemed as though something might have entered the place, as though the tenant for whom the rude shelter had been left standing might even now have taken possession.

Cuthbert Fairhope worked himself into such a state of nervousness that he would gladly have turned away without violating what seemed to be the dwelling-place of death. However, he dared not disobey his uncle; and so, not giving himself time for further consideration, he plunged into the interior.

Everything was neat and orderly, everything had been "tidied up." There was the little bowl of food and various trifles, the significance of which the lad could not understand. But there was one object that riveted the explorer's gaze and explained the significance of the hurried whisper, "*Search the tent.*" There, roughly mended and neatly folded together, lay the coat they had travelled so many hundreds of weary miles in search of! Carefully arranged on the top of the coat was a little book. Feeling as though he were in a dream, Cuthbert took the book and opened it. It was a shabby, small, old-fashioned English New Testament, and on the fly-leaf he read the words, written in a big, boyish hand, "*From Bert.*" Beneath was the date, and nothing more.

Cuthbert Fairhope stood one moment amazed, then he sank sobbing on his knees. "Oh how wonderful this is! O God, how can we thank Thee for such goodness?"

He realized, as by a flash of light, the value, the evidential value, of that book. It had been a brotherly offering from himself to Fraser when the latter was about to start for America. Being so small it would easily lie—forgotten perhaps—in the coat-pocket. Doubtless, it lay there when poor foolish Fraser had played for that last unlucky stake.

But there was no time to lose. Slipping the tiny volume into his pocket, Cuthbert rolled the coat into a bundle and hurried from the tent. He was glad to be in the open air again; but even so he had the feeling for some time that he was being pursued by some invisible and angry ghost.

Making what speed he could over the rough ground, the robber—for such he certainly felt himself—reached the turn of the river in about half an hour. A glance sufficed to show that he was well in advance of the canoe, and that circumstance fortunately gave him time to take measures for carefully concealing the coat. He had sufficient knowledge of the Indians to be sure that this was absolutely necessary. Had the theft been discovered a mutiny would have been the result, and probably not even the authority of James Fairhope would have availed to save the sacrilegious robber from the vengeance of Jamaica Jim's outraged relatives. After some consideration, and after trying other methods, Cuthbert Fairhope adopted the rather unpleasant expedient of putting on the coat underneath all his own garments. This certainly gave him rather a portly appearance; but as, once in the canoe, he would be sitting down, he hoped that his increased bulk might escape notice. At any rate, without recourse to personal violence, it would not be possible to bring home a direct conviction.

Having scrambled into the canoe with some display of agility, Bert handed the knife ostentatiously to his uncle, and the old gentleman was equally careful that his loud-toned thanks should be heard of all. No suspicion seemed to have been aroused, and later on, when the voyage had been resumed, a few whispered words gave James Fairhope the information that he longed for.

The party being absolutely without food or any proper means of shelter, it was resolved to push right on throughout the night in the hope of

reaching Chipewyan Fort at a comparatively early hour next day. This course was not without its dangers, but it was rendered feasible by the moon being nearly at the full. The crew was divided into two watches, under the direction respectively of Mr. Fairhope and the Indian pilot. These worked alternately at the paddles for four hours at a stretch. In this way excellent progress was made during the night.

It was scarcely noon the next day when the junction of the Peace and Slave Rivers, with Fort Chipewyan on the opposite bank, came in sight. A hearty cheer from those in the boat was quickly responded to from the fort, and in a few moments the landing-place was all animation to welcome the return—the unexpectedly early return—of the voyagers.

“I am right glad to hear that cheer,” said the factor to the missionary, “for otherwise I would fear that their coming back so soon augured ill.”

“Yes; they would hardly cheer if anything were seriously wrong—say, if Mr. Fairhope was ill,” replied the missionary.

The two men were thinking of the same thing, for the ominous change in James Fairhope’s appearance and manner had haunted them both. Exchanging significant glances, they hurried down to the river to welcome their old friend.

That evening there was a merry party in the fort, and they all laughed when Bert described how he was put to it to conceal the precious coat. But when he told the story of the little Testament, there were some who felt more inclined to cry than they had done for many a long day. When the volume

itself was produced it was handed from one to another in reverential silence. All noticed that James Fairhope behaved in a way that was totally unlike him. He was excited, talked incessantly, bragged of past achievements, and vowed that he would start for the Athabasca the very next morning.

"Rest!" he cried, when they counselled a few days' delay; "what's the good of talking about rest when there is work to be done? The old man is game yet, and it's a shame for the young ones to want to lie abed. I feel a bit stiff of a morning myself sometimes, but just keep going, and it soon wears off. I feel up to anything to-night—as fit as when I was forty."

And so he talked on in loud and exaggerated strains, till the factor rose and said—

"Well, you young sparks may be able to travel all day and talk all night, but it doesn't suit an old fellow like me, so I tell you I'm one for bed."

Then the clergyman promptly expressed the same view; and so, after a little chaffing and joking, the party was broken up and every one retired to rest.

Next morning the missionary, who was also the medical adviser of the fort, reported that Mr. Fairhope was very ill, in a high fever, and quite unfit to travel. There would be no more river-work for him this many a day.





CHAPTER XXVII.

A WINTER JOURNEY.

MANY days passed, and James Fairhope was no better ; indeed, it was evident to those around him that the old man was losing rather than gaining ground. For a week he had been in a high fever and quite delirious ; and now that his senses were returned he was fretting and fuming over the delay occasioned by his untimely breakdown.

What was to be done ? Cuthbert did not like to leave his uncle, and he shrank from the idea of undertaking a long and perilous journey by himself. It was not fear that made him backward, but the consciousness of his own utter inexperience. The touch of real hardship and danger had brought with it modesty and self-knowledge.

Nor was it for some time that James Fairhope would let the truth as to his actual condition near him. Each day he professed to feel stronger, and talked about the necessary preparations for the long journey towards the south. Thus precious time was lost, and the terrible winter of the North-West drew on apace.

One day, to the surprise of everybody, the old man woke up to a full consciousness of the actual state of affairs.

"Why, Bert my boy, there is not an hour to lose. You must start at once. There is no use waiting for me—I'm done. Even if I could hope to travel within the next couple of weeks, I'd be a burden to you. You are not afraid to go alone, are you? They will all lend a helping hand for the old man's sake, and will push you along on your road."

"I'm *not* afraid, uncle," replied the lad, "but I don't like the thought of leaving you. It seems a mean thing to turn my back and leave you here, after all you have done for me, too."

"It can't be helped, lad," replied the old man, with a sigh. "You must think about your poor brother, and of all that may depend on your arriving in time."

And so the matter was finally settled at railroad speed. The very next morning a boat belonging to the Hudson Bay people was starting up the river to Athabasca Landing, to relieve a sick servant of the Company who was stationed there as storekeeper. Such an opportunity would not occur again before the closing of the river by the frost, and Cuthbert Fairhope accordingly decided not to let it slip. His preparations were quickly made. A formal deposition was made by him and his uncle before the Company's agent, who was also a justice of the peace, in which the circumstance attending the finding of the coat were set forth and sworn to in detail. Two copies of the document, duly signed and attested, were made; one of these was given to Cuthbert,

the other was retained at the fort, in case of accidents.

That night uncle and nephew had a pathetic parting. The old man had been feverishly impatient all day for Bert's departure; yet he knew well that with that departure the last interest in life would die out for himself. His parting words were characteristic—

"Good-bye, my boy. Keep a brave heart, a cool head, and put your trust in God. Never lie to any man; never bully or cheat an Indian; don't lose your temper if you can help it—no, not even with a French breed dog-driver. Give my love to darling Hilda, and say—that if the old man is spared through another winter, he will come down to see her. Perhaps she will be settled in a nice little home of her own by that time; for I know a man, and she knows him too, who could make her happy."

A little further talk, a few more messages, and then they said good night and good-bye. The old man dropped off to sleep, and with the first streak of daylight the young one had commenced his journey.

All went well and smoothly till the lake was passed and the Athabasca River entered. Then the trouble began. To keep in mid-stream meant stemming a strong down-flowing current, while all along the banks navigation was rendered tedious and risky by the ice which was rapidly forming on all sides. The cold was intense, and the spray from the paddles was dashed against the faces of the voyagers in the form of sharp cruel lumps of ice.

Two days were fought through in this way, and on the third it was evident that the river would soon be completely frozen over. Solid ice-fields were already firm in their attachment to either bank, while between their abrupt outer edges the narrowed and tortuous current flowed swift and black, as if eager to escape the fetters that were being steadily drawn around it. But at this period of his journey Cuthbert Fairhope was in the hands of true men, *voyageurs* who had been trained from boyhood upward in the service of the great Company—half-breeds most of them, but men of splendid physique and infinite resources. Every necessary provision had been made. The stores were well chosen and abundant, the fur robes and sleeping-bags all that the most experienced traveller could demand.

Still, when yet another day had passed, they found it killing work. Once or twice an attempt was made to tow the boat, but the ice was not yet sufficiently compact to afford a safe foothold for any considerable distance. At last the course of the river became so impeded with great blocks of floating ice, that no further progress was to be hoped for. Then the boat was drawn up beneath a huge cliff, and, after a good night's rest, the party started to walk the remaining distance, which was computed at about twenty miles, to the Landing. Bert was amazed at the strength and powers of endurance displayed by his companions during this last stage of the journey. Though heavily laden for the most part, not one of the men complained of fatigue or seemed distressed; while poor Bert, carrying nothing but the precious coat and a few

small articles in a sort of knapsack, was scarcely able during the last hours of the day to stagger along on his feet.

At the Landing Bert found a hearty welcome—"for the old man's sake"—as his uncle had foretold; but he also found formidable difficulties confronting him. The regular staff at the Company's storehouse had been reduced by sickness and other causes, there were scarcely any dogs available, nor was any one found willing to undertake the office of guide across the now frozen and snow-covered country to Edmonton. But, as usually happens, energy and importunity were at last victorious. Three miserable dogs and one splendid fellow were got together, a little skin-covered cariole was bought, and a scoundrelly half-breed named Batiste undertook to make the journey to Edmonton with this team in three days. The officer in charge of the station hardly liked the arrangement, but Bert was determined to get away and there was no use trying to stay him. He vowed that to Edmonton he would get, even though he had to walk there alone.

The sun was bright though the air was very cold as Cuthbert Fairhope took his seat triumphantly in the little carriage behind the dogs, and essayed for the first time to direct his novel team, while Batiste prepared to run with agile foot beside the leader's head. Having no fears or distrust in his own honest heart, Bert was somewhat startled when the storekeeper, leaning forward to say good-bye, thrust a little case into his hand.

"As you have insisted on trusting yourself to the tender mercies of the most unmitigated villain

in the North-West, you must take my six-shooter as a travelling companion. You can leave it at our place in Edmonton, to be kept till called for. Now, mum's the word. Good-bye and good luck. There, away you go." And before Bert could utter a word of thanks or remonstrance, the dogs were off and the inexperienced traveller had much ado to keep himself from being pitched out of his narrow carriage.

For the greater part of the first day matters went pleasantly enough. Bert thoroughly enjoyed the novel sensation of bowling along behind the yelping dogs over the frozen surface of the snow-clad, silent land. He marvelled alike at the dexterity, endurance, and vituperative powers of Batiste. The half-breed trotted all day in advance or beside the dogs, directing, slashing with his long whip, and swearing at the poor brutes unweariedly. It is said out there that no man can be a good dog-driver who is not able to swear volubly in three languages—French at any rate being absolutely essential. Whether the swearing produced any appreciable effect Bert could not say, but long before the day was over he felt thoroughly sickened and enraged by the often wanton cruelty of his guide. He began to understand the significance of his uncle's exhortation to try and keep his temper, even with a French breed dog-driver. The swearing was bad enough, but the blows were worse.

As already stated, three of the dogs were miserable cross-bred curs, altogether unsuited for hauling, and on these unfortunates Batiste was never weary venting imprecations and blows. No doubt they were troublesome and irritating animals. One of them

had seldom been in harness before, and being still little more than a puppy, he would keep jumping about and snapping at his surly, broken-spirited companions. It was in the case of this unfortunate that Bert first witnessed the process that is technically described as "sending a dog to Rome." The poor brute having got entangled in the harness, and not having the wit to stand still, Batiste settled his gambols by striking him a blow on the head. The dog fell senseless, and as Bert supposed dead, in the snow, and Batiste was enabled to go on with his disentangling operations unmolested. After a time the wretched dazed creature staggered to his feet, and then being stimulated with a lash from the whip, he sprang forward on the track with his companions in misery. Before evening this particular dog had become useless owing to the icicles that formed between his toes and cut into his feet. Experienced dogs are in the habit of removing these obstacles with their teeth from time to time; but the younger ones sometimes suffer terribly, leaving their blood-stained tracks on the snow as evidence of their misery. When a dog gets very lame he is provided with a shoe consisting of a piece of soft leather drawn over the foot and tied with a running string round the ankle. Protected in this way the wounds will often recover, even in the course of a long journey. But "shoes" mean trouble, and Batiste would have laughed at the idea of taking trouble about a dog. For these poor dumb companions of his life, with all their fidelity, endurance, and affection, he had nothing but lashes, kicks, and oaths.

For the leading dog, however, even Batiste had

some respect. Yellow Paw, as he was named, was a half-bred Esquimaux, the one species of dog to whom hauling comes naturally, and to whom therefore the work is not a misery. This dog seldom stood in need of correction, and as he was never the better of it, the driver found it his best policy to let him alone. Occasionally, however, the man's savage disposition got the better of his prudence, and he lashed out at Yellow Paw as freely as at the cringing mongrels in the rear. Then there was sure to be a row. The great dog would show his teeth and snarl. Sometimes he would lie down and refuse to move, remaining apparently indifferent to kicks and blows. Sometimes he would literally upset the coach by suddenly bolting at an angle, dragging the other dogs after him and overturning poor Bert ignominiously in the snow.

Towards the close of the first day's travel several scenes of this sort had occurred, amid which Cuthbert's feeble remonstrances and suggestions had been treated by the driver with arrogant indifference. At last, however, matters came to a crisis. The camping-place had been reached, and the weary dogs had been released from their harness. Then, without any provocation, and simply to gratify a cruel consciousness of power, Batiste began to lash out at the weary brutes, whose one idea was to snatch an interval of sleep before receiving the fish supper, which constituted the single meal of the day.

"Will you let those wretched dogs alone, you brute?" shouted Bert, who was busily engaged in unloading the cariole.

"What do you know about dogs, you white baby?" was the scornful retort. "You mind your own part of the business."

Hitherto Batiste had been exercising his skill on the starved flanks of the inferior dogs, while Yellow Paw looked on with a curious mixture of rage, contempt, and fear on his expressive face. This silent expression, coupled with the honest English lad's outspoken disgust, maddened the bully.

"What are you looking at me like that for, you white-faced beast?" he shouted, at the same time bringing the lash of the whip right across the dog's eyes.

With a howl of rage, Yellow Paw sprang at the tyrant's throat. But Batiste, accustomed to such encounters, was too quick for his adversary. Dodging aside, he received the half-blinded dog with a terrific blow of his fist; then, as the poor brute rolled on the ground, rained down blows and kicks upon him, till he was well-nigh senseless.

"Hold there, I tell you. You know it was your own fault. You've punished the poor brute enough," cried Bert.

"Have I? You'll see," retorted the driver. Then with wonderful agility he slipped a leather thong round the dog's neck, secured it to the stump of a tree, and, springing back, brought down the lash on his victim's side with such effect that it left a long red gash behind.

Cuthbert Fairhope could not stand a sight like that.

"Quit that, you cowardly scoundrel; quit it this instant, I order you," he shouted.

The half-breed turned on him savagely. "*You* order me, do you? Who are you, baby-face, I'd like to know?"

"I'm your employer, and I order you to lay down that whip and to loose the dog," said Bert, quietly, for in the moment of emergency he had suddenly grown calm.

Batiste scorned to argue with a child. Contenting himself with a shower of oaths, he turned and brought down his whip with another whizzing stroke on Yellow Paw's quivering flank.

He never knew clearly how it came about, but the next instant Cuthbert found himself standing, revolver in hand, between Batiste and the dog.

"Obey my orders, or I shoot," he said quietly.

Batiste commenced a loud laugh, but it died away ineffectually in his throat. There was something in the lad's aspect that he did not like, and he was sharp enough to notice the quivering of the finger that rested on the hair trigger.

"Well, boss, you won't be so tender about a dog's hide when you've had as much to say to the cusses as I have had. But there is no use us two falling out about it here in the snow, so let's have our supper and get to sleep."

"All right, that is just to my taste; but loose the dog first."

"You must do that yourself, young master; I won't have anything to say to him unless I may manage him my own way."

Then, without any fear, Bert loosed the great dog, patted his head, and encouraged him to come towards the fire; and Yellow Paw lifted the great shaggy limb from the colour of which he derived



"OBEY MY ORDERS, OR I SHOOT."

Page 304.

his name, shook hands, and, in his inarticulate canine language, vowed eternal friendship. How valuable that friendship was to prove his deliverer had no presentiment.

That night Bert had his first experience of sleeping in a sack beneath the open sky, surrounded by snow, and with the thermometer at ten degrees below zero. This sack, which was lent to him at the Landing, for the journey, was made of cabri skins sewn together with the hair turned inwards, the whole being protected with a canvas covering. It was very light, but wondrously effective in resisting cold. Thus Bert found going to bed a very simple matter. He spread a buffalo robe on the ground near the fire, unrolled his sack, crept into it, closed the flap, and soon was fast asleep and dreaming of the old days at Pixley. At the sleeper's feet lay Yellow Paw. The position of the other dogs was indicated by three small hillocks in the snow. Bert suffered no inconvenience during the night, yet on waking the flap of the bag was so tightly frozen down, that it required some little exertion to open it.

The second day's travel was tedious and trying in the extreme. In places the snow was soft, and the dogs sank into it at every step. Batiste swore and lashed out savagely, and Bert, not knowing how far such methods were necessary in order to keep the tired-out dogs on their feet at all, forbore to remonstrate. To relieve the poor brutes as much as possible, however, he ran for hours together beside the cariole. But the dogs continued to suffer, and as the afternoon drew on they showed signs of collapsing altogether. The

three smaller ones were evidently dead beat, while Yellow Paw, in his rage against his driver, sulked and shirked whenever he dared. Finally, the climax was reached when the poor puppy, having been "sent to Rome" once too often, happily for his own sake failed to return. He was accordingly unharnessed and left "a frozen corpse" upon the plain. Alive, no one had thought much of him, poor chap, but "every little helps," and when he was gone the loaded sledge went heavier than before.

In the course of that miserable afternoon Bert made the discovery that he had either lost or been robbed of a considerable sum of money that his uncle had given him at parting. The notes had been safe in a little pocket-book the previous evening, now they were nowhere to be found. Bert mentioned the matter to Batiste, but that worthy looked at him as though he were a fool, and deigned to make no reply. There was no use saying anything more at present, only Bert resolved to keep a strict watch on his companion, and to have the matter thoroughly investigated when Edmonton was reached. He also resolved to take all his remaining valuables, including the coat and the revolver, into his sleeping-bag with him that night.

Having found a tolerable camping-ground beneath a prominent bluff of dark rock, the usual arrangements for the night were made. After supper, the dogs having been fed, and everything put right for the night, young Fairhope found himself quite ready for bed. His companion's movements, however, puzzled him and excited his

curiosity. Batiste seemed restless and disinclined for sleep. On one excuse or another he wandered about, and finally Bert, who had just crept into his sack, saw the fellow apparently scraping away the snow from a spot at the base of the rock.

"What's up?" he cried from his resting-place ; "have you discovered anything?"

Batiste turned quickly round with an oath, then muttering something which Bert was too sleepy to listen to, he came towards the fire, wrapped himself in his buffalo robe, and lay down at last.

When Cuthbert Fairhope awoke next morning he was surprised to find that it was already daylight. But he was not awake sufficiently to think much about the matter. He opened the flap just enough to see that it was snowing, and to feel that it was intensely cold. Within the bag all was warm and comfortable ; so, with a vague reflection that Batiste knew all about it, he curled himself up and went to sleep again. How long he slept he could not tell, but when he woke again it was with all his wits about him. He tore open the frozen flap, scrambled to his feet, and looked about him. He looked about him, and what did he behold? Snow, snow everywhere, and nothing but snow! Though now very wide awake indeed, he tried to hope that he was dreaming. What did it mean? Neither sledge, nor driver, nor dogs were to be seen! Had they all been snowed up in the night? No ; the surface was level all round, presenting no indication of any bulky objects being hidden beneath. Indeed, it was evident that but little snow had fallen. The remains of the fire were still traceable, and the buffalo robe on which

Bert had been sleeping was only partially covered ; but the fall had been sufficient to obliterate every trail and footprint.

Cuthbert Fairhope looked steadily round the white, silent scene. Then he realized that he was alone in that vast solitude, that he had been deliberately deserted and left to perish. He looked at his watch, and found that it was already ten o'clock.





CHAPTER XXVIII,

LEFT TO PERISH.

IT was a terrible situation, and even an old traveller who knew the country might have been pardoned for giving way to despair. But after the first moment of bewilderment and heart-sickening terror, Cuthbert Fairhope rapidly recovered his self-possession and coolness. He fancied that the outline of the hills on the horizon was not wholly unfamiliar. Then he remembered that according to Batiste's calculation they must, in the two days, have covered about eighty miles from Athabasca Landing. Possibly, therefore, Edmonton was not more than twenty or thirty miles distant, and some outlying farm or mission station might be come upon at a much lesser distance. True, there was no trail visible nor any indication of a road; but Bert knew that by marching south and bearing a little to the east, he must sooner or later strike the Saskatchewan River. It was a question, he told himself, of endurance, and nothing else. So he rolled up his sack and buffalo robe and prepared to march,

Hour after hour the solitary traveller tramped bravely forward. He endeavoured to forget his fatigue and to sustain his spirits by "making believe very much." He composed several little romances. He pictured to himself the farmhouse where he was to be received just as the light began to fail. He conjured up a vision of a pretty, sympathetic maiden, and a roaring pine-log fire. Then he travelled back in thought to the old days at Pixley, when he had often walked across the snow-clad downs and played at being lost. Now he was trying to play at *not* being lost!

Before leaving the camping-place of the previous night, Bert had made a careful search in the hope of finding something to eat. Fortunately, he had come upon a piece of pemmican and some of the fish that had been thrown to the dogs. This meagre supply he had carefully treasured; and now, after five hours' walking, he thought himself entitled to some rest and refreshment. Unfastening the rude knapsack that he had made in the morning, he spread his buffalo robe on the snow, took about half his provisions from the sack, and "sat down to enjoy himself."

While thus resting and recruiting under the lee of a little willow grove, Bert suddenly discovered that he knew the place quite well. For a minute he was puzzled, but then he recalled the first halt that he and his uncle had made on their journey north from Edmonton. That halt had been made close to the spot where he was now sitting. The young fellow sprang to his feet joyously, and made his way to the other side of the grove. Yes, he could not be mistaken. He had studied the

bearings of the place carefully at the time, and now he recalled the position of all his landmarks. For a few moments this discovery filled his heart with joy ; but on reflection it was not pleasant to know that he was still some thirty miles distant from Edmonton, and probably more than half that distance from the nearest inhabited house. How black and hopeless a task did it appear to retrace on foot the journey that had been so pleasantly accomplished before breakfast on a summer morning !

For the first time fully realizing how critical was the position in which he stood, Cuthbert Fairhope repacked his knapsack, and struggled forward on his lonely and uncertain road. He had not gone far, however, when a sharp sound echoed through the silent land. Next moment a speck was observable on a distant hillside. It was moving, because, as Bert watched it, it became obscured by some trifling inequality of the ground. Then it reappeared further down the hill, and Bert concluded that it must be a four-legged animal of some sort. The speck assumed definite shape and came nearer ; then he knew that it was a large dog. A sharp yelp of joy rang through the air, and Yellow Paw was standing on his hind legs, with his great forefeet planted on the shoulders of his recovered friend.

"And have you come back to look for me, noble fellow ?" exclaimed Bert as, with tears in his eyes, he returned the dog's caresses.

And the dog, in an ecstasy, beat upon the lad's shoulders with his paws and licked his face in glad response. Poor brute ! he had evidently been most

cruelly treated, bearing as he did the marks of recent blows on his head and body. It seemed, too, that he had violently broken away from his cruel tyrant, since a considerable portion of his harness was still attached to him.

The sudden and welcome appearance of Yellow Paw inspired Bert with fresh hope and energy. With such a faithful and powerful companion by his side, the idea of ultimate disaster was not to be entertained. He plucked up courage and prepared to struggle on ; but a pathetic look on the dog's face arrested him. Yellow Paw was hungry, and as he sniffed at the crumbs of Bert's recently finished repast, he became painfully aware of the fact. He put his head on one side and mutely pleaded his case. A minute later the last stored-up fragments of pemmican and fish had vanished down his capacious throat.

The toilsome journey was now resumed, the dog running on in front, and looking back every now and then to see how his friend was getting on. Alas ! after the first hour, poor Bert was not able to make very much of it. The glow of pleasurable excitement caused by Yellow Paw's timely appearance having died away, the lonely lad felt ready to drop with fatigue. After a while he was scarcely able to distinguish objects as he stumbled along in the gathering gloom. Occasionally he would stand still, and then the dog would come back, sit beside him, poke his nose into the fur-gloved hands, and do what in him lay to cheer and encourage. But when at last the poor lad, overcome with fatigue and drowsiness, threw himself on the ground, Yellow Paw took more energetic measures. His

instinct told him what sleep under such circumstances meant, and he forthwith raised a howl of remonstrance. Then he barked loudly, pulled at the prostrate figure with teeth and claws, until the fainting lad was compelled to rise and stagger onward.

Night closed in, the stars came forth and looked coldly down on the dreary scene. Cuthbert Fairhope no longer knew where he was. Like one in a dream, he walked on mechanically, and the great dog walked patiently at his side. An hour ago he had been sorely tempted to throw away his pack, which clung like a garment of lead to his shoulders, but he had managed to resist the fatal impulse. He would not, while life lasted, part with the evidence of his brother's innocence, and he knew that a night of exposure without his sleeping sack meant certain death. But now he had arrived at a state of complete indifference. All sensation and nearly all intelligence seemed paralyzed. He felt no pain, he suffered no fear; he kept walking simply because he was on his feet, and they, having been in motion so long, continued to move. The only thing that roused him at all was the plaintive whimper of the dog, as he rubbed his head against his side and poked at him with his nose.

"Good dog! good dog!" Bert would murmur. "I'm sorry I have nothing for you. It will be all right by-and-by when we get to that farmhouse. I won't let them forget you; you shall have some nice fish. And I'll have a good long sleep. That is all I want; I don't want food—only sleep, blessed sleep."

The weary travellers had reached the top of a

small hill, to the further side of which a few dried-up, frozen trees were clinging. Cuthbert Fairhope stood still, and, having stopped, he felt that he could not advance another step—no, not to save his life. The machine had broken down, and where it was it would have to stay. All around was absolute darkness, and the darkness within seemed to be closing upon the faint, flickering flame of life. The traveller leant heavily against one of the trees, and let his pack drop at his feet. As he did so the dog barked loudly, but the sound seemed to be very far off and to have no connection with the fainting man.

Then, as Bert leant against the tree, with a vague feeling that he wanted to do something which he was too tired and sleepy to do, a light flashed before his drooping eyes. It was a far-off, uncertain light, and he watched it without interest or curiosity. Then of a sudden Yellow Paw sprang forward and barked yet more loud and fierce than he had done before. The sound died away over the dark, wintry waste. Then there came back the echo. Was it an echo or the cheery response of another dog out there in the darkness?

Yellow Paw had no doubt as to the answer to that question. He was already dancing round his chosen master, snapping at him with short, spasmodic barks, and doing all that his canine wit could suggest to rouse him to one supreme effort. But Bert was past being roused. A terrible torpor was creeping over him. Everything seemed to his dulled senses distant and unreal. The light before him had become multiplex, and brought up the memory of the first time he had seen the streets of

London at night ; the distant baying in his ears, whether it were echo or answer, recalled a day when he had come upon the hounds in the midst of a fog on Pixley downs.

But habit and instinct sometimes help when reason has lost her sway. Without knowing how he had got at it, Cuthbert Fairhope found himself creeping into his sleeping-bag. He had spread the buffalo robe at the foot of the tree which had supported him. He was sitting on the ground now, and he had drawn the cover of the bag over his ears and head. As he fell backward he felt that he cared for nothing but sleep, and sleep he would have even though he should never wake. The last thing that he was conscious of was that a sort of tattoo was being beaten on his head. He knew that it was Yellow Paw trying to rouse and scratch him out ; and he was ungrateful enough to be angry with the dog as he rolled over on his face to escape these troublesome attentions. Then a dismal, prolonged howl was sounded close to his ear ; but even that was powerless to keep him awake.





CHAPTER XXIX.

MOOSE-JAW SPEAKS.

THE day was at last fixed for the great murder trial. Intense excitement prevailed. Every one had been talking about the case for months, and every newspaper had been writing about it. There were some fluctuations of opinion, but on the whole the feeling against poor Fraser continued to be very strong. More than once Mr. Lynton had obtained a postponement of trial; but now it was decided not to seek any further delay. For this there were several reasons. First, the impression made by renewed applications for postponement was by no means in favour of the prisoner. Delay also involved expense, and that was a consideration, notwithstanding that old James Fairhope had placed a sum of money at the lawyer's disposal before setting out on his journey to the North. Finally, the poor prisoner himself was eager to have the issue decided. His old confidence that the justice of his cause would prove sufficient defence had returned to him. He simply *could not*

be found guilty of a crime of which he was absolutely innocent. And so, though there had been no news received from Mr. Fairhope or Bert, no further attempt was made to obtain an alteration of the date that had finally been decided on.

Meantime, Frank Lynton was far from sharing his client's hopefulness. He was by no means satisfied with the defence as it stood. Nothing that could be found out about Fraser's antecedents since his arrival in Canada was likely to tell in his favour. There was every reason to fear that the facts, when exposed in the cold, merciless light of judicial investigation, would tell very hardly on the prisoner. True, there was no direct evidence of guilt; but, on the other hand, there was nothing positive by which Fraser could be dissociated from the crime, which must have been committed by some one. The tailor's evidence might be taken as tending in either direction, for if he had made a coat for Buckthorpe he had also made one for Fairhope. Moreover, Buckthorpe could not be found. Nobody, with one exception, seemed to know of his existence, and Mr. Lynton found himself baffled in every attempt to trace the man. For reasons that will be readily understood, he did not like to speak publicly about the interview at Edmonton of which Hilda had told him. Finally, accepting the alternative that the crime would lie in common estimation between Fairhope and Parker, there seemed every reason to fear that the latter would be able to establish a satisfactory *alibi*.

The first ray of hope broke on Frank Lynton about a week before the trial; it came from Moose-

jaw. The attitude of the Indian had been a puzzle to the lawyer from the first. It seemed as if the cunning old man was "lying low" for some purpose; but the probability was that he had not quite made up his brooding mind as to the man on whose head the blood of his dead master lay. That he had been pursuing investigations on his own account was more than suspected, but he had hitherto remained absolutely silent as to the nature of the evidence that he proposed to give at the trial. Frank Lynton was delighted therefore when, towards the close of one bitter winter day, the Indian was ushered into his private room at the Alberta. He concealed his feelings, however, and refrained from asking his visitor a single question about the trial. He inquired for Mrs. Fergie and Nellie, alluded to the weather, mentioned which train was on time and which was likely to be a couple of hours late. Then he bid the Indian smoke, and waited patiently.

At length the old fellow broke silence. "Mr. Lynton, you are wise and know the law. Moose-jaw is but a poor ignorant Indian."

"But the Indian knows many things the white man can never learn from his books," was the diplomatic and flattering response.

"Yes," assented the old man meditatively; "the Great Spirit pities his poor, lost, wandering children, and he whispers to them even as he does to our dogs and horses."

"What has the Great Spirit whispered in Moose-jaw's ear?" inquired the lawyer, secretly anxious to bring his visitor to the point.

The answer came with startling brevity. "The

name of the man that killed Moose-jaw's friend and master."

"Ah! And dare Moose-jaw repeat that name?"

"Parker."

Frank Lynton showed no signs of any emotion, but answered with affected carelessness—

"But he says he can prove he was many miles away."

"The men at Barton's ranch will say that he was there three hours after sunset, and that no man could ride from the ranch to the place where the wicked deed was done before darkness came down again, even in the summer-time."

"Well, and will not that prove the case?" said the lawyer, unable to conceal his disappointment.

The Indian chuckled to himself. "The same men will bear witness that I left them at ten o'clock the night before last, and I will swear that, though it was in winter, I struck the trail to Smooth Rock at five o'clock the next day."

"Ah, that is something," exclaimed Lynton. "But, after all, it is running it very close. The murder must have been committed before six o'clock."

"But it may not have been three hours after sunset when Parker left the ranch. They are white men, and can only speak certainly of time when they have a clock to tell them. They have no clock, and it was Parker himself who told them how long the sun had set."

"But the distance is great, and all men do not ride as Moose-jaw," persisted the lawyer.

The Indian seemed to accept the compliment as his due. He assented, "Yes, Moose-jaw rides

well; but Parker rode the fleetest horse in this country, and he also knew the right trail."

"Is there more than one trail, then?"

"There is a trail across the Lone Lake swamps. It is dangerous, but the man who takes it cuts two hours from his journey. Parker knew that trail, because Moose-jaw himself had shown it to him."

"This is indeed important. We must have a proper map of the district." And Frank Lynton, having taken a few rapid notes of what he had heard, looked up inquiringly as if "asking for more."

"Yes, there is more," said the Indian, answering the mute appeal. "I have found the horse."

"What horse?" inquired Lynton, dubiously.

"Day-dawn, that my master ever loved to ride." And now for the first time the old man displayed some emotion. "It was a long trail, but I followed it up, and found my beauty dead—shot—shot by Parker."

"And you have known this for some time. Why did you not tell it before?" demanded the lawyer, angrily.

"The white man had chosen his own defender. Why should a poor red man speak at all? besides, Moose-jaw would not tell half a story."

Humbly as the words were spoken, the young lawyer had a disagreeable suspicion that he was being made fun of.

"Every man, white or red or black, is bound to do what he can to help the cause of justice," he said solemnly.

"Shall the red man continue to speak?" inquired

the old man, in the same provoking tone of humility, as soon as the above fine sentiment had been delivered.

"Certainly. And why do you say it was Parker shot the horse?" said Lynton, sharply.

"It was not Fraser Fairhope that shot him. Every chamber of the revolver found with him was loaded, and the body of Day-dawn lies ten miles to the north beyond the Lone Lake swamp."

"Perhaps the horse ran away, and was shot by some one else," suggested Lynton.

The Indian shook his head. "Day-dawn would never have left the master when alive, and when dead he would have come straight home."

"How then do you think it all happened?"

The old man closed his eyes. "Moose-jaw sees it all," he said in a low dreamy voice. "They ride together side by side, for there were two horse tracks leading into the swamp. Then my master goes on a little, and in a moment the coward Parker strikes him from behind. He falls forward into the mud. Parker turns and rides away, leading Day-dawn behind him, for there were two tracks leading *out* of the swamp, one behind the other, and that behind was faint because there was no rider on the horse. Then Parker led the horse away to the back of Lone Lake swamp, and shot him. He dare not keep the horse, and he knew that if let loose he would be home within an hour."

"How do you know that Fergie was on horseback when he was struck?" inquired Lynton, who had been following the whole scene as described by the Indian with intense interest.

The reply was short and cogent. "Because the heels of his boots and his trousers were quite clean when we lifted him up. Also he had fallen with force, as no man could fall when standing on his feet."

"And Moose-jaw will swear to all this?" said Lynton, regarding the quiet old man with admiration.

"Moose-jaw will swear, and Moose-jaw will speak the truth," was the dignified response.

Then, with but few words more, the Indian rose and slipped noiselessly away.

The second great ray of light that illumined Mr. Lynton's brief shot forth with even more startling suddenness.

Donald had come down to Calgary to be near his brother during the trial. Naturally he was shy and shrank from observation, fearing to be pointed at as the brother of the suspected murderer. He went about but little, and scarcely showed himself in daylight at all. It happened on the very night after Moose-jaw's visit that he was hurrying through the bar of the Alberta, keeping close to Frank Lynton's heels, when he happened to notice a man who was lounging in one of the large chairs with which, after the American fashion, the bar was liberally furnished. He recognized the face at once, and, putting his hand on Lynton's shoulder, whispered eagerly—

"That is the man you want—Dick Buckthorpe. I would know him anywhere."

The lawyer started and glanced round.

"Speak to him at once. Introduce me. Goodness, to think of this! It had occurred to me,

but I had dismissed it as a piece of far-fetched romance."

Donald looked surprised, but he turned at once. "Mr. Richard Buckthorpe, I believe?" he said politely.

The man thus addressed rose at once. "I think you mistake, sir." Then lifting his hat, he took the opportunity to replace it low down over his eyes.

"No, my friend makes no mistake. You are Mr. Buckthorpe—Buckthorpe, *alias* Parker," said Lynton, quietly.

"That word is an insult, sir; I shall hold you accountable for it." Then seeing further concealment would be useless, he continued, with his native effrontery, "I suppose you have heard of a gentleman changing his name sometimes, when he comes into a property or for some other reason. But he is not on that account to be exposed to the insolence of every stranger he may casually meet."

"I am no stranger to you, *Mr. Parker*; you have met me as Fraser Fairhope's counsel once or twice. And this gentleman is no stranger to you by name, at any rate, *Mr. Buckthorpe*; he is Mr. Donald Fairhope, the brother of a much-wronged man."

"The brother of a man just about to take his trial for the murder of my friend. I think, do you know, I may, without offence, decline the honour of an introduction. To you, Mr. Lynton, I should have been happy to introduce myself by my former name, had I any idea that you took an interest in it or had ever heard of it."

"I take a very great interest in the name, I

assure you, sir ; and I see that it may be suggestive of abundant possibilities," replied Lynton.

"Well, you will see that there was no deception intended," said Dick, carelessly. "It seems this young man would have recognized me when the trial came on."

"Yes, even if no one else had been present to do so," remarked Lynton, significantly.

Richard Buckthorpe started, clenched his fist, and took a half-step forward ; then recovering himself, he said quietly—

"Ah, well, be that as it may, this is scarcely the time or place for a discussion of this sort. You know where to find me now that you have discovered my *alias*, Mr. Lawyer. Good night, gentlemen." Then he strode out into the bitter night.





CHAPTER XXX.

AN IMPOSSIBLE REQUEST.

FRANK LYNTON could not all at once settle with himself what might be the significance of the discovery he had just made. Late into the night he paced his room, turning the matter over every way in his mind. More than once in the course of his investigations the idea had occurred to him that possibly Parker and Buckthorpe might be one and the same man; but on each occasion he had dismissed the theory as only fit for a sensation novel. Now he was angry with himself for having treated the matter so lightly.

But the question pressed—What was to be done? and how would the identification of Parker affect the trial? Then, after the first flush of joy at the timely discovery he had made, the lawyer began to be doubtful as to the answer to the second question. True, discredit would be thrown on the man's evidence, and Miss Fergie would be able to prove that under the name of Buckthorpe he had been deeply indebted to her brother. This would supply a possible motive; but the main facts

against Fraser—his proximity to the scene of the crime, the money found upon him, Fergie's revolver hid in his sleeping place—these remained just as they were before. They might have great weight with a prejudiced jury, and after all to prove that one man was a cheat was not the same as disproving another man to be a murderer.

Thus Frank Lynton debated the case with himself, and the more he did so, the more the conviction forced upon him that the only way to make sure of his client's acquittal, was by putting Hilda in the witness chair. She would be able to prove that Buckthorpe had admitted Parker's complicity in the crime, and now that he was identified with that individual, the proposal he had made to the girl was in itself an evidence of guilt. But for several reasons Frank Lynton shrank from bringing Hilda forward. The idea of the girl becoming the centre of public attraction was torture to him. He knew, too, that it would be inexpressibly painful to Hilda, and his trained acumen had convinced him that there might be, and probably was, something more in the background—some story of the past, which if dragged out on cross-examination, would cause misery and mortification to the woman he so dearly loved. Still, he felt that the defence of his client was a first duty to which all other considerations must be subordinated.

Miss Fairhope herself arrived at Calgary two days before the trial. Lynton at once put the whole case frankly before her, and asked what she would wish to be done. The poor girl was greatly distressed, even more so than the lawyer had anticipated.

"I should like," she said slowly, and with evident effort, "to leave myself altogether in your hands, Mr. Lynton. Of course, if it is necessary for my brother's safety that I should appear, every other consideration must be sacrificed to that. But it will be a great trial to me."

"To make sure of your brother's acquittal, I unhesitatingly say that you ought to appear; but at the same time I will not say that it is essential. Donald's identification of Buckthorpe is quite sufficient for the immediate purpose. And Moose-jaw's evidence as to the *alibi* and the horse may induce the jury to look at the case in a very favourable light." The reply was uttered judiciously, perhaps even frigidly.

"But you are not satisfied; you do not tell me what you think my duty is," urged Hilda.

"Excuse me, Miss Fairhope," answered Lynton, in the same reserved tone, "I do not know all the circumstances of the case. I know, of course, that an appearance in court would be distasteful to you. To detail the nature of the proposal which you have hinted was made to you by Buckthorpe would be most unpleasant. But this, I take it, does not represent the whole of your objection. You will please bear in mind that I am not inviting your further confidence; but as you had not granted it to me, I do not feel competent to advise."

"Oh, Mr. Lynton, do not speak harshly to me. You do not know how miserable I am," she pleaded in a low, trembling voice.

"Speak harshly to *you*! How could I ever do that?" he cried, as he caught her hand in his

impulsively. "I simply strove to put personal feeling aside, to speak to you as your legal adviser. And indeed I have no right to speak to you as anything else."

"Not as a friend, then?" she murmured.

"Ah, Hilda, if only you would let me; if only you would trust me!" And he drew the hand that he was holding just a little closer to himself.

"Does it not occur to you," she said, with a faint smile, "that if I could bring myself to regard you as merely a 'legal adviser,' I might have less hesitation in telling you things? I suppose people don't much mind what they say to doctors or lawyers in a professional way."

"Hilda—let me call you by that sweet name—surely you know that there is but one thing that I care to know from you."

She interrupted him, drawing away her hand, and speaking with a forced laugh.

"But I want to know from you what I ought to do about giving evidence. Remember that whatever else you are, you are certainly my *legal adviser*."

"You are right to remind me of that," he said gravely. Then, having paced up and down the room silently for a minute, he turned to her. "I do not know what to advise. Think it over yourself. You know how matters stand, or stood, between you and—and this man. We need not decide at this moment. Besides, something may turn up. Ah! who is there?"

He went to the door and took a telegram from the hand of a messenger, who had just knocked.

"Hurrah!" he cried, "the knot is cut—the question answered—the problem solved."

Hilda looked at him in amazement. It was certainly most unlawyer-like behaviour.

"Read that—read that, Miss Hilda Fairhope." He thrust the paper into her hand, and she read—

"Good news. Case clear. Have got coat. Expect by next train. Bert."

"We shall not need to trouble you, miss"—and it was plainly the lawyer who was speaking now—"the case is clear, and the only thing remaining is to get a warrant for Buckthorpe's arrest. I had better see about it at once."

Hilda turned very pale. A sudden sensation of sickness and misery came over her.

"I don't understand. The case clear—Buckthorpe's arrest!" she stammered.

He looked at her sharply, almost angrily. He spoke impatiently.

"Yes. Do you not see? The tailor swears to two coats—Buckthorpe's and your brother's. Bert says in the telegram that he has got your brother's; therefore the other, found close to the scene of the murder, was Buckthorpe's—the very coat that Fraser can swear he fished up out of the water in Quebec Harbour. Clear case, I should say. I'll go to the jury confidently with it."

"Yes," said Hilda; "but possibly this man that uncle and Bert went in search of committed the murder himself. Several people have said so. The message may mean that it is a clear case against *him*."

Frank Lynton started, and now it was he that became pale.

"Miss Fairhope," he said sternly, "you know—we all know that Jack Fergie was done to death

by this cold-blooded ruffian Buckthorpe, or Parker, or whatever he may like to call himself. The only difficulty was about obtaining legal proof; and now that Providence has granted that to us, you seek to excuse the man. I do not understand it."

There was a long silence. He went and looked out through the window. It was a cold, dreary prospect. Not a living thing was to be seen, and the electric light which illumined the little town in every direction shone with cruel gleam on the frozen snow. Why, Frank Lynton asked himself, had he ever got mixed up in this miserable business? Who were these unknown immigrants that he should have become entangled with them? He had lost precious time and thrown up lucrative business to undertake the defence of a conceited, dissipated, broken gambler. He had done his best; and here was the girl, for love of whom he had done it all, trying to defend a murderer and a man who would without scruple have let her brother be hanged to save himself. There was but one conclusion—Hilda loved the man, deep-dyed villain though he was; she had loved him all along, and would, woman-like, do anything to save him.

From these bitter reflections he was roused by the sound of a sob behind him. He turned, and there stood Hilda, her clasped hands wrung together, and her pale, tear-stained face drawn and distorted with the intensity of her conflicting emotions. Lynton looked at her in silent scorn.

"Oh, Mr. Lynton, you have been so kind to me—to me and mine! Do not look at me in that way. I cannot bear it. Let me plead for mercy."

"For mercy on your lover—on one who would willingly have been a double murderer?" he said bitterly.

"No, sir. You shall not insult me," she exclaimed indignantly, the whole expression of her face changing in an instant. "You forget yourself, Mr. Lynton. I did not expect this at your hands."

"What other conclusion could I draw?" was the dogged response.

"You might have drawn some other conclusion less insulting, less shameful to me," she said, choking back a sob. "You might have remembered what I as good as told you of this man's offer to me that day at Edmonton—of the way he threatened me. But do you know nothing of the quality of mercy? can you allow nothing for the influence of old associations? Richard Buckthorpe lived as a child in our parish. My father baptized him. My dear father would plead for him if he were alive to-day. But there, I will not deceive you—I will not raise a false issue, as I suppose you lawyers would call it. I will speak the truth, I will tell my folly and my shame. I did fancy once that I loved this man. I was a child—an inexperienced and conceited girl. He flattered me; he played with my vanity and my sense of self-importance. But I will not blame him; I will rather blame myself. I deceived my dear father; none of my family knew anything about it. Then I found out something of the man's character, and I was glad when he went away. I never heard of him, never saw him again till that day at Edmonton when he came to insult me with his insolent proposals. And do you think, Frank

Lynton, that I could love such a man? Do you think it was a kind or manly thing to call him my lover? Has he not brought shame enough on me to make me hate him? I *do* hate him. And yet—and yet there is such a thing as pity. I ask you to spare him.”

Spell-bound by this torrent of impassioned language, Frank Lynton had not sought to interrupt the girl. When she had finished he said in a low tone—

“Miss Fairhope, you ask of me a hard thing.”

“But will you do it—do it for *me*?” she broke in.

“There is but little in the world that I would not do for you,” he replied; “but this thing that you ask of me is a crime. I accept what you have told me; I thank you from my heart for condescending to—to justify yourself to me. And you will believe me that even if it were not as you say—if you loved this wretched man to-day, I would try to remain uninfluenced by any personal considerations. At your direction I would defend him, and do my utmost for him if he stood a criminal in the dock to-morrow. But I am the servant of the law, and I dare not connive at a criminal’s escape. Were I to do so, I could never practise at an honourable profession again—nay, I could never hold up my head with self-respect among honest men.”

“You are determined, then, to have this man arrested, even though you have no actual proof of his guilt?” said Hilda.

“There is more than enough evidence to warrant his detention. Do you forget, Miss Fairhope, that he was quite ready to let your brother be hanged?”

"I do not believe he would have allowed matters to go so far as that ; I cannot, will not believe it of him. He would have told the truth, or have managed in some way that Fraser should get off. There is no use making people out worse than they are."

Mr. Lynton laughed harshly. "Nor is there any use in believing them better than they have proved themselves to be."

"You refuse to help me, then, Mr. Lynton? You turn a deaf ear to my plea for mercy, and I have humbled myself to you in vain!" exclaimed the girl, somewhat hysterically.

"I am not deaf to your appeal, Miss Fairhope, and I am sorry you should consider that you have humbled yourself in any way. But you ask an impossibility, and I trust the time will come when you will see this matter in another light."

Hilda made another effort. "Will you not wait till uncle and Bert arrive? Then you would be sure of your ground."

"There will be no train to-morrow," said the lawyer, coldly, "and I do not feel justified in allowing a dangerous criminal to remain at large. I shall apply for a warrant this very night."

He was leaving the room hastily, when she called him back.

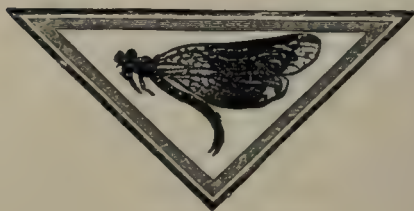
"Mr. Lynton," she said, "do not let us part otherwise than as friends. Perhaps I ought not to have asked you to do this thing for me. Do not think that I am angry, or that because you have refused, I like—I mean that I honour or respect you less. And on your side you will not

imagine—that is, you will believe that I have told you just the truth—nothing more, nothing less.”

“Of course I believe you—simply, implicitly. I think, too, I can understand your feeling; but for me the path of duty—painful duty—is clear.” He spoke more gently than he had done for some time, and once more took her hand in his.

“Then you must do what you think right,” she said firmly. “I only wish that I had had some one to teach me that the path of duty was the only safe and honourable one, even though it might be painful.”

He lifted her hand to his lips, and then left the room in silence,





CHAPTER XXXI.

AN UNPLEASANT INTERVIEW.

NOW," said Frank Lynton to himself, as he muffled his fur coat round him and descended into the street, "I have lost her. Sweet soul, she was very kind just now ; but it's not likely a woman would ever bring herself to marry a man who had been instrumental in hanging her former lover. And to think that Hilda Fairhope—*my* Hilda—should ever have fancied even that she cared for a ruffian like Buckthorpe? What was her father doing to allow it? She should have been protected, protected from her own ignorance, poor child. And now, am I too hard on her—too hard on myself? Might I not have given this wretched fellow for whom her dear lips pleaded the chance to mizzle, to confess the truth and fly? What good will it do to hang him? Can I even expect Hilda to forgive me if I do?"

Thus questioning and arguing with himself, Frank Lynton reached the house of the officer from whom the warrant was to be obtained. He paused, passed on, walked round an entire block,

and came back to the same place. "God help me, I can do no otherwise," he murmured, as he pressed the button of the electric bell.

A minute later a Chinaman was volubly explaining that his master was not at home. "Him just gone—not three, four, five minutes. Back early morning—back for the business. No business now—pleasure now."

The lawyer turned away relieved. He might possibly have obtained the warrant elsewhere; but it was getting late, and the words of John Chinaman were ringing like music in his ears, "No business now—pleasure now." "It will do as well in the morning," he said to himself, as he turned in the direction of the Alberta, where he knew Donald, who had been spending an hour with his imprisoned brother, would be waiting for him.

And Hilda, meanwhile, had been making her bitter plaint, with face hidden between her arms on the table in front of her.

"Now I have lost him, silly girl that I was. How can he ever respect me or care for me again? Why should I have troubled about that wicked, cruel man? How, at least, could I expect Mr. Lynton to sympathize with my morbid, sentimental feeling? He has refused to listen to me, and he has done right! But for me, I must just bear the consequences of my own want of courage and straightforwardness. Oh, dear father, to think that I should have deceived you so! And what now will my brothers think of me when all this wretched story comes out?"

The poor girl got up and walked about the room. After a time she grew easier, and her face

became calm. "I was wrong," she said aloud, "to ask *him* to do what I should have done myself." Then, after another turn up and down, she continued, "Yes, I will do it ; I alone must bear the responsibility." She muffled herself warmly up, put on a thick woollen veil, and slipped downstairs and out into the cold night air. By a mere chance she knew where the man she was about to seek would probably be found ; her brother had casually pointed out the place in passing that very day.

The house stood by itself at the end of the town, and Hilda was not without misgivings as she knocked for admittance. When the door was abruptly opened by Buckthorpe in person she was, for the moment, completely taken aback.

"I wish to speak to you," she stammered ; "can I come in?"

Not recognizing her, he answered, with a laugh, "With all the pleasure in life, my dear ; I wouldn't think of shutting the door in the face of any young woman."

He put out his hand towards her, but she walked straight past him into the dark passage.

"This way, my dear young lady. Allow me." Stooping forward, he pushed open the door of a lighted room with one hand, while with the other he closed the communication with the street.

"I have come to warn you—to give you a chance to escape. All is known," she began with nervous impetuosity.

"Ah, this sounds thrilling and romantic." Then recognizing her as she removed her veil and muffling, he exclaimed in an altered voice, "What! Miss Fairhope—Hilda, you come to me!"

He was advancing eagerly, when a motion of her hand checked him.

"Stay, sir. Do not misunderstand me. I have come here out of pity, pity for—for what you once were. If you stay here you will be arrested this night for murder—for the murder of which you have allowed my innocent brother to be accused. Your dreadful wickedness has been found out."

"Come, my dear, this is going it rather strong. My double personality was but a harmless joke. Of course, I knew it was bound to come out sooner or later; but a deception of this sort is hardly a thing to hang a poor fellow for. My word, it was fun to know that your lawyer-friend was moving heaven and earth to discover Richard Buckthorpe's whereabouts, when he could have had the honour of an interview with him any day he liked!"

Hilda, who had wrought herself up to what she felt to be an heroic effort, was very angry at this exhibition of conceit and callousness.

"You forget the acknowledgment you made to me at Edmonton, that Parker—whom you described as a friend of yours—was actually concerned in the crime of which you know my brother to be quite innocent."

"Let it be—let it be," he interrupted scornfully. "You need not remind me of the lies I have told, and the tricks I have played. Hilda, have you no pity for me? You know how I love you. You know that you could save me—make a new man of me. I asked you to do so at Edmonton. I ask you now again. You were always a good girl; is it not your duty to do what you can to save a

poor fellow from destruction? You loved me once; will you let me perish now?"

Such colossal and insolent selfishness had fortunately no other effect but to disgust and thoroughly disenchant the girl.

"You insult me by daring to use such words, you—you whose hands are stained with blood."

"Hilda," he cried passionately, "it is not so bad as that. My hands are not stained with blood. I will tell you the truth, the whole truth, and you may swear it against me in the witness-box if you like."

"Sir, I desire to hear nothing. I wish never to be obliged to listen to the sound of your voice again. I simply warn you to fly if you wish to save your wretched life." And as she spoke she took a step towards the door.

He sprang in front of her. "Whether you like it or not you *shall* hear my story. Ay, let them come and arrest me while I am telling it; but you shall hear. I am not quite the villain you think me. I did not intend to kill poor Fergie. I swear that I would not have let your brother be hanged. I would have got him off somehow. At first I did not know who he was; then when I found out I was tempted to make use of his misfortune to try and influence you. And I tell you I never meant to kill Fergie," he continued, with at least the appearance of intense excitement. "It happened this way. There had been money questions between us, and I admit that I was in a mess. We had had our differences; poor Jack wouldn't look at things in the broad light in which I was accustomed to regard them. Well, I was at a place called

Barton's Ranch, many miles from Smooth Rock, when I got a letter from Fergie, saying that he was going to show some papers to a man in Calgary. I knew that would be ruin to me—perhaps to him, too, poor foolish fellow. So I rode right away to try and stop him. I had intended to go to his ranch, but he must have started early for some reason. So I met him on the track to the dépôt, close by the Lone Lake swamp. We rode along together, and I admit that we quarrelled, but I never intended to injure him."

"What about the pistol, then?" suggested Hilda, interest and curiosity getting the better of anger and repugnance.

"I saw it loose in his pocket, and when I got the chance I chucked it away. He was a hot sort of fellow, was poor dear Jack, when he was roused; and, you see, I didn't want to have any unpleasantness." Buckthorpe gave this little explanation with unblushing effrontery, and then resumed his narrative. "Jack, for all he was so quiet, could be terribly obstinate and aggravating when he chose. He thought he knew the way, and so landed us in the swamp. Then, as he rode on in front, I got riled, and—well, I just gave him a tap on the head with my loaded whip-handle. I must have hit him harder than I intended, for he went down in the mud just as if he had been shot. I looked at him as he lay there; I never touched him again, I never got off my horse. But I knew the papers we had been disputing about were in his saddle-bag, so I turned and rode away, leading his horse after me." For the first time the man's bravado seemed cowed, the self-vindicating voice trembled, and Richard Buck-

thorpe passed his hand over his eyes as though he would wipe out the too vivid recollection of that last backward glance as he left his victim to his fate.

"And you shot the horse," said Hilda. She felt that she must say something to relieve the tension of her feelings as the whole dreadful scene rose before her.

"Ah, that has been discovered, too—they have sniffed out the beast's carcass, have they?" cried Buckthorpe, looking more really alarmed than he had heretofore done.

"Yes," said Hilda; "and more than that. The man has been found to whom poor Fraser sold his coat. The coat has been recovered, so that the other which the police have possession of must be yours. You know now how the case against you stands, wretched man!"

A dark, grave shadow spread over Richard Buckthorpe's usually careless face. He stood a moment biting his finger while he stared into the girl's pale face. Then he spoke, but in a voice that Hilda scarcely recognized.

"I am indebted to you, Miss Fairhope, for the trouble you have taken; but does it not occur to you that you have put yourself in my power—in the power of a desperate man?"

"You can have no object in injuring me, and it would not help yourself in any way," she said proudly. Yet as she spoke her heart beat heavily, for during the conversation she had shrunk back, as though to avoid the profanation of the man's touch or even of his close proximity, and now she felt herself at bay.

"Hilda," he said slowly, "I am about to make a last appeal to you. You do not understand what despair, coupled perhaps with jealousy, may drive a man to. You loved me once—I believe you love me still, or you would not have come here to-night. Do you think I am the sort of man to yield you up to a miserable lawyer-fellow without a struggle? Hilda, you can save me—you can make a new man of me; we can be happy yet. Come to me."

Her eyes were blazing now with indignant scorn, and her lips were quivering with excitement as she replied—

"You are mad to speak to me in such language. I love you! Why, I loathe you, wretch that you are. You presume on the past. What happened then? You trifled with the affections of an ignorant child. You induced me to deceive the best and most trusting of fathers. You made me miserable, because you took the truthfulness out of my young life. You made me fancy perhaps that I cared for you, and all the while, no doubt, you laughed at me. At any rate, you left me when it suited your purpose—left me to shame and self-reproach. And now, stained as you are with actual crime, you have the vanity and insolence to obtrude your insulting attentions upon me. I pitied you, as I would pity any poor, wretched criminal. I wished to give you a loophole for escape, and this is the return with which I meet. Stand aside, and let me pass, sir."

Despite this outburst of fiery, righteous indignation, the man stood his ground and looked at her unabashed. Outwardly he remained calm, but there was a dull, savage glare in his eyes as he spoke.

"I always thought you pretty, but I never knew that you were beautiful till now, Hilda. I freely admit I made a mistake when I thought so little of your love. But you must not provoke a man too much. Why, at this very moment I do not know whether to love or hate you, whether to worship you or to shoot you." Then, with a half-frenzied laugh, he snatched a pistol from his pocket. "Which is it to be?" he cried; "which is it to be? You drive me to despair. Why not make an end of both at once? It would be romantic, would it not?"

Hilda Fairhope felt that the critical moment of her life had arrived. She had never asked herself whether or not she was a brave girl. There was no time to ask the question now. By some instinct of self-preservation, she kept her eyes steadily fixed on the handsome but now convulsed and malignant face in front of her.

"You are a coward," she said quietly, "to threaten a defenceless woman who has voluntarily come to do you a service, and you would be a fool to kill yourself while you have still the chance to escape. Put down that pistol, I order you, and let me pass."

She walked steadily forward, and as she did so he retreated a step as one might do from the path of some superhuman visitant. Out into the passage she passed, and on through the little hall. She opened the street door and went forth into the bitter cold. All this she did unfalteringly, drawn forward as it were by some sustaining, invisible hand, although oppressed with a great horror lest each moment should be her last.

Only when she found herself, she scarce knew how, right out on the roadway, beneath the glare of the electric light, did Hilda draw her breath and turn round. Richard Buckthorpe was standing in the doorway with folded arms looking after her. That was the last the girl saw of him. She drew her fur cloak round her shuddering body and hurried from the spot.





CHAPTER XXXII.

YELLOW PAW'S APPEAL.

THE reader will want to know how it was that Cuthbert Fairhope ever found himself awake and in a position to send that very reassuring and welcome telegram to Mr. Lynton. It happened on this-wise. Matthew Burrows, according to an old-established practice of his, was having a nightly look round his premises. Lantern in hand, and attended by a small-bodied but great-spirited dog who rejoiced in the name of Fury, he went from stable to byre, and from byre to barn, to see that all was right before retiring to his well-earned rest. It was very cold, and Matthew, not being as young and active as he once was, wished nothing better than to have his inspection over and to find himself safe housed for the night. He was considerably annoyed, therefore, at the perverse behaviour of Fury. This dog was of the irrepressible species. When he had made up his great mind to bark, bark he would despite entreaties, threats, or even blows. Cowed for a moment, he, like so many little dogs of his class, was up again like a Jack-

in-the-box, resolute to have his say, or his bark, out at whatever cost. So it was with Fury that night. He was not to be subdued. It was bark, bark, bark, and then, just as his master had thought him quieted down, it was bark, bark, bark again. In the intervals between these shrill outbursts, Matthew Burrows listened intently, but he could not hear a sound. It was acknowledged, however, [that Fury was a dog of exceptionally acute hearing powers.

"What has come to the dog, I wonder—he is making such a row?" said Mr. Burrows rather crossly as he re-entered the sitting-room and approached the well-nigh red-hot stove.

"Shall I take the gun and have a look round outside? Fury don't mostly give tongue unless he knows what for." The speaker was our old acquaintance, George Page, who seemed to be now quite domesticated at the farm. It had come about in this way. Matthew Burrows had taken a fancy to the young man on that first introduction which has been already described, and finding him to be an old friend of Esther's, had made him welcome when in due time he came over as a sort of escort to Miss Fairhope. Subsequently Master George had come over on his own account—or, let us rather say, on Esther's. Finally, the old man had made a temporary arrangement whereby he was to stop for several months and give his services in helping to put matters straight on the new holding and getting in the first year's crop. So far the arrangement had proved satisfactory to all parties concerned; indeed, there seemed every prospect of its becoming permanent.

"There is no need to stir, and I can tell you it's mortal cold," replied Burrows, partly out of good-natured consideration for the two old friends who seemed to be having a good time of it over the stove, and partly perhaps because he resented the suggestion that a youngster just out from the old country could discover anything that escaped his own observation.

"It is not likely there is anybody within five miles of the place to-night," said Esther, looking up from her work. "It seems a pity to have to go out."

George threw a grateful glance at the considerate damsel, but answered bravely—

"Still, I'll go like a shot if there's a chance of being of any use to man or beast."

Further discussion was cut short by a renewed hubbub on Fury's part. The dog was evidently determined to distinguish himself. It isn't, he as much as said, every day or night that a little dog gets such a chance. Such a chance might never occur again in that lone region; so fury was determined to make the best of it, and to win an enduring reputation. Seeing that every one was eager to listen, the dog consented to be silent for a minute; then his suppressed excitement got the better of him, and he began to bark with redoubled vigour.

"There is something up," said old Burrows. "Reach me that gun."

While Esther got down the weapon, George flung open the door and Fury rushed out into the night and the snow.

"Stand clear there! let me have room to fire," shouted the old farmer, as a great white object came bounding out of the darkness.

"Hold, sir! It's a dog—and a beauty, too," called out George, who was standing in the doorway.

Next instant Yellow Paw was in the midst of the little company, wagging his great tail and looking from one face to another for sympathy. Seeming to have made up his mind in favour of Esther, he walked up to the girl and laid his big yellow paw on her lap.

"Oh, what a magnificent creature!" cried the girl. "I never saw such a dog. What is the matter, poor fellow? What do you want? Where do you come from?" And with each question she patted the great head, that was almost on a level with her own.

In response to this friendly greeting Yellow Paw executed a little dance round the room, accompanied by a series of ecstatic barks, while Fury joined in, anxious that his own share in the transaction should not be overlooked. Having finished his performance, the dog commenced pawing at Esther's knees impatiently, and even went so far in his anxiety as to take a portion of her dress between his teeth.

"There is something up—a man lost in the snow most like. We must go out and search," said old Burrows. "That is a sort of dog knows what he is talking about, I guess."

Immediate preparations were made, and in a very few minutes the sturdy old farmer and young Page were ready to start.

"I'd like to go with you; I might be of use," said Esther, wistfully.

"Better stay and help to have everything ready

for our return. If so be we find any poor fellow, he is likely to be well-nigh perished ; so there'll be need of blankets and hot water, and all that you two women can think of, to bring the life back to him," said Mr. Burrows.

" Yes ; the girl and I will do our part ; and may the Lord guide your steps this night, Matt ! See, take this flask of brandy with you ; you may need it." So saying, Mrs. Burrows handled a small bottle to her husband, and proceeded to wrap him carefully and lovingly against the cold of that awful night.

Led by Yellow Paw, the two men trudged over a mile through the snow till they reached the spot where Cuthbert Fairhope was lying unconscious in his sleeping-bag. For a while they saw nothing, a fresh fall of snow having covered the ground. It was only when the dog bounded on a little white mound and began to scratch and whine that they suspected that a fellow-creature was lying beneath.

Nor did the rescuers find it an easy matter to arouse the exhausted lad, or to restore him to consciousness. They rubbed him, and slapped him, and shouted, and poured brandy down his throat ; but for a long time they could get nothing out of poor Bert, save inarticulate murmurs of pathetic entreaties to be let alone. Matters looked serious. They knew that if the lad could not be roused, his body would soon be frozen despite all their efforts. They now regretted that they had opened the bag, and debated anxiously as to the best course to pursue. George proposed that he should take Bert, sack, and all upon his

shoulders and carry him. But though he was a strong young fellow, such a feat was plainly beyond his powers. He persisted in attempting it, however, and in this way a somewhat more sheltered and favourable spot was reached. The next idea was that one of the men should return to the farm to get a horse and sledge; but on consideration that plan was also abandoned.

"There is nothing for it but to light a fire, and to camp out where we are till morning," said Matthew Burrows, quietly. "When we have made all snug, you can go back and tell Mrs. Burrows and Esther how we are fixed."

Fortunately nothing had been forgotten. They had an axe, and the means of obtaining light. So, under the old man's skilled direction, George Page set to work with brawny arms. The ground was cleared, the timber felled, and a huge fire quickly kindled. How merrily did it crackle in the frosty air, and how delightful was the warmth as it pierced the killing cold! Soon both men felt more hopeful and content.

The night wore on. The younger man refused to leave his companion; nor, upon consideration, did it seem necessary. They felt sure that the women would see the fire, and would come to a right conclusion as to how matters stood. Towards morning, Bert woke up as from a refreshing sleep, stretched himself, looked out of his bag (back into which they had put him), and began to wonder where he was.

"I say, Batiste, what were you pulling me about in the night for? or did I only dream that a lot of fellows were trying to wake me up and march me along, whether I would or not? It was like my

Uncle Toby and the corporal. 'He shall march,' said my uncle. 'He can't,' said the corporal. 'He shall be held up,' said my uncle. 'He'll drop at last,' persisted the corporal. That was just like it; and I dropped at last, or dreamt I did."

Now, neither Mr. Burrows nor honest George had ever heard of "Tristram Shandy," and they naturally enough concluded that either the patient's brains were still frozen, or that he was a lunatic. And, indeed, poor Bert was considerably muddled in his mind, especially when he was sufficiently awake to find that he was not in his old camp and to recall the events of the previous day. However, he soon recovered his wits; and as soon as the actual state of affairs was explained to him, he professed to feel quite strong and ready to go forward.

It being now daylight, there was no need of further delay. Old Matthew Burrows expressed his regret that he had no breakfast to offer Bert.

"If we'd have only thought to bring a kettle, and some tea or coffee, it would have come in even more useful than the brandy," he said consolately.

In response, Fury, who had accompanied the relief expedition, set up a sudden cry, and started forward.

"What's up now, I wonder?" said George, following the little dog to the other side of the clump of low brush under which they had been bivouacking during the night. "Why, if it isn't a horse! And—and—yes, it's Esther coming along, too!"

"I've brought you your breakfasts," she cried

out when she saw George. "I saw the fire, and concluded something was detaining you. I'd have set out soon only Auntie Burrows wouldn't let me stir till daylight. Now, tell me what it is all about. Have you saved any lives?"

"My word, Esther, you *be* a woman surely! I believe there is none like you anywheres. To think you've brought us breakfast, now—fancy that!"

Esther, who was looking none the worse for her early ride through the snow, laughed more lightly than she had done for many a day, and looked well-pleased.

"But you haven't told me what has happened; I want to know."

The story did not take long to tell, yet somehow it was a considerable time before the pair got round to the left side of the little clump, and were able to announce the happy intelligence of breakfast being at hand to old Matthew and Bert.

After all the hardships and anxieties of the night, they were quite a merry little party. Neither George nor Esther were ever likely to forget that morning, nor did Cuthbert Fairhope ever enjoy a cup of hot coffee more than he did then.

After breakfast they started for the farm. At first Bert professed himself quite well, but after he had tottered a hundred yards or so, he was glad to mount the horse. Short as the distance was it took some time to cover, and more than once the poor lad felt as though he would drop to the ground. When at last the farm was reached, good Mrs. Burrows had everything in readiness to minister to the creature-comforts of the weary party. Bert

soon found himself in a comfortable bed, and therein he gladly remained for twenty-four hours. It was not till the expiration of that time that George Page discovered that the young fellow whose life had been so providentially saved was Hilda Fairhope's brother.

But though Bert was willing enough to enjoy a prolonged rest, there were two duties that brooked him no delay ; the first was to inform the authorities at Edmonton of Batiste's villainy, so that prompt measures might be taken for his arrest ; the second was to despatch a telegram to Mr. Lynton at Calgary. Both these tasks were undertaken by Matthew Burrows, while his wife sat sewing by Bert's bedside, and George and Esther talked over the dear old Pixley days in the kitchen. But their talk was not only of the past ; there was a future to be planned for, and hoped for, and worked for.





CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE TRIAL—UNLOOKED-FOR DEVELOPMENTS.

TO the great disgust of the sensation-loving portion of the public, the army of newspaper men assembled, and various other persons directly or indirectly interested, the great Fergie murder trial ended in a fizzle; that is to say, it became, so far as Fraser Fairhope was concerned, a mere form with a foregone conclusion.

Very early on the morning of the eventful day a warrant was issued for the arrest of Buckthorpe, *alias* Parker. But the bird had already flown.

"He must have got some intimation of what was impending," said Frank Lynton, looking steadily into Hilda's face when the news of the disappearance arrived.

"I understood you intended to have him arrested last night. Why did you delay?" she answered back quietly, and with a look as steadfast as his own.

Why had he delayed? Had the sternness of his principles softened at all? Had he entertained any suspicion of what might happen?

These questions occurred to him, but he had no time to consider them, before answering somewhat lamely—

“I did take some steps; but it was late. The officer was out. I thought the morning would do.”

“Well, anyhow, he is gone,” said Hilda, somewhat contemptuously. “And now, I suppose, there will be no difficulty about getting poor dear Fraser released.”

He looked at her reproachfully, and not without surprise. She spoke as though he had been the means of keeping her brother in prison, instead of exerting himself, as he had been doing for months, on his behalf.

“The trial must, of course, go on,” he said coldly; “but it will now be little more, I trust, than a matter of form. It would have been more satisfactory and conclusive, however, if we had had the right man to put in the dock in his stead. I am resolved that no stone shall be left unturned to discover the villain. If ever there was a man who deserved no mercy it is this Buckthorpe, or Parker, or whatever else he may be called.” So in bitterness, and with something very like a quarrel looming over them, they parted that morning. Many days were destined to elapse ere they met again.

Frank Lynton hurried to the court to be in his place at the opening of the trial. There was a large attendance, but Fraser Fairhope was no longer the centre of attraction. Every one was asking what had become of Parker. It was ascertained that the man had taken his splendid horse from the stable at about eleven o'clock the previous night, and ridden away; but where to no one

could imagine. It hardly seemed likely that, unequipped as he was, he had ventured on a long journey, considering the severity of the weather. Some said this riding away was merely a blind, and that in all probability the man had returned to the town and hidden himself away in some safe retreat. Others held it not unlikely that he had made right across country to some of the outlying ranches where he was known to have friends. Yet another theory was that he had made his way to some distant dépôt, either on the main line or on one of the branches, and there boarded the train, having, no doubt, disguised himself first. All this was of course the merest speculation; the only point on which all were agreed was in regarding this sudden flight as tantamount to an admission of guilt. But why, then, had he held out so long, only to give in at the last? A few said it was conscience; others, laughing at that idea, said that he had somehow got a hint of the new evidence that was to be produced for the defence—for the rumour was already circulated that something of the first importance had within the last few hours come to Mr. Lynton's knowledge. What was it? And how had Parker got to know about it?

Speculations of this sort were for the time hushed by the opening of the trial. The prosecution brought forward the facts already known. Fraser was a gambler and a black sheep. He had lost his last cent at the saloon, yet at Smooth Rock he was known to be in possession of coin. Confessedly he had been close to the scene of the murder just about the time of its occurrence; Fergie's pistol was discovered secreted in his sleeping-

place ; and finally, the coat found in the swamp would be identified as one which the prisoner had been wearing when he left the dépôt. This seemed to make a pretty strong case, yet it was put forward apologetically and half-heartedly, and as though it was sure to be exploded.

The widow and Nellie Fergie were the first witnesses examined. They testified as to the time of the murdered man's departure from home, and as to the circumstances of Fraser's arrival in the evening. They also established the fact—the widow with emphasis, and Nellie with evident reluctance—that during the time he was at the ranch, and till suspicion turned on himself, Fraser had never said a word about having seen Parker in company with Jack Fergie.

Evidence was next brought, both from the railway dépôt, and the hotel where Fraser had spent the forenoon, as to the gambling and the coat. The man had been absolutely "cleaned out," and he had worn throughout the day a light overcoat exactly like that which the police now produced.

When the defence was entered on, Mr. Lynton's first witness was the old Indian, Moose-jaw. This man's description of the various trails as followed up by him was listened to with breathless interest ; but when he came to the discovery of Day-dawn's remains, an audible murmur of surprise ran through the court. The statement of the Indian that the blow which felled poor Fergie could not have been inflicted by any one standing on the ground produced a profound sensation. There were other points which could not be urged, since it was

Fairhope that was on his trial, not Parker. Still, Mr. Lynton managed that Moose-jaw should have an opportunity of stating the actual time occupied by him in riding from Barker's Ranch to the Lone Lake swamp. He also, in cross-examination, obtained from Nellie Fergie a willing admission that there had been differences between her brother and Parker about money matters. This question was objected to by the prosecution; but it was sufficient for Lynton's present purpose that he had elicited the answer before formally withdrawing it.

The next witness was the English tailor. This gentleman swore that the coat produced by the police had been made in his establishment in Canterbury. For whom had he made it? He could not exactly say, because the number had become illegible; but he had made one such coat for the prisoner, Mr. Fraser Fairhope. He had made another for a gentleman residing in the same neighbourhood, Mr. Richard Buckthorpe.

"Have you any idea," demanded the counsel for the prosecution, "where Mr. Buckthorpe is at this moment?"

"None whatever," was the prompt reply. "I should like to find him, because he never paid me, and his uncle refused to do so."

"But you have no doubt that you made a coat exactly similar to that now produced for the prisoner Fairhope?"

"None whatever," replied the tailor. "It was exactly similar, if it was not the same. I could only tell by the number."

"And the coat that you made for Mr. Buckthorpe—for this gentleman who omitted to pay—may be

at Jericho or at the bottom of the sea for all you know?"

"That is so," said the tailor. He then stepped down.

"I now call Donald Fairhope," said Mr. Lynton, quietly.

Donald having been sworn, gave evidence of his identification of Parker with Richard Buckthorpe. He was about to retire when the prosecution interfered.

"Did you know Mr. Richard Buckthorpe intimately in the old country?"

"No, I did not. He was seldom at Pixley since I was a boy, and afterwards I was a good deal away myself," admitted Donald, frankly.

"Umph! Did you know the man *at all*?"

"I met him once, as I have just described," said Donald.

"You met a man, and had an interchange of ideas with him; but how do you know that he was Richard Buckthorpe?"

"Well," replied poor Donald, with some hesitation, "all the circumstances pointed that way, and my father said it must have been the squire's nephew."

"Ah! your worthy father, who did *not* see the man, is your authority for identifying in the Alberta Hotel a man whose name you did not know. Satisfactory, very!"

The witness was retiring abashed, when Lynton stopped him.

"You will swear, however, that the man whom you met in Pixley Woods, in England, was the same man who passes here as Parker?"

"Certainly ; I will swear to that."

"I can, if necessary, bring further evidence to establish the identity between Parker and Buckthorpe," said Mr. Lynton, rising to address the court ; "but I do not anticipate that it will be necessary. I now ask for an adjournment till to-morrow, when I propose to produce in court the actual coat worn by the prisoner on that day, and parted with by him to a man who has been traced. The gentleman who has the coat, and who is furnished with the necessary evidence, is now on the road from Edmonton. I had a wire this morning advising me that he had started. He will be here this evening, and in court to-morrow morning. Under these circumstances I feel that to offer any further remarks now, or to produce other witnesses, would be a waste of time."

Upon this application the court adjourned till the next morning, and every one went about regretting, first, that an innocent man should be kept another night in prison, and secondly, that the real criminal should have been, in some mysterious way, allowed to escape.

At about eight o'clock that evening Bert arrived from Edmonton, and was immediately carried off by Lynton to his rooms. The lawyer was a good deal disappointed ; first, to hear of his old friend, James Fairhope's illness, and enforced absence, and, secondly, at the news of Jamaica Jim's untimely end. However, the sight of the tattered old coat, together with Bert's detailed description of the way in which it had been found, and the old man's attested declaration to the same effect, reassured him. The discovery of the little Testament was a

new link in the chain, and a very strong one too, as Mr. Lynton at once perceived.

On the resumption of the trial next morning, Bert was at once called. The story of his adventures, and of the way in which the coat had been recovered, was listened to with breathless attention, while the production of the little Testament in court was a pathetic as well as a most important incident. The tailor was then recalled.

"You will please to take that garment in your hands and examine it. It has not been unfolded since the last witness brought it to me last night."

The tailor unfolded the ragged garment and examined it carefully.

"Can you give the court any information as to the making or history of that coat?" was the next question.

"Yes," replied the gentleman from Canterbury; "it was made in my establishment, and cut from the same piece of cloth as the article we had under inspection yesterday."

"You are ready to swear to that?"

"Certainly; I would know my own make anywhere. And besides, the cloth is somewhat peculiar. I made six coats from the piece, and the rest is still in stock; so that if any gentleman should require——"

"Can you tell us anything about the other four coats?" interrupted the judge, smiling.

"Yes. When the inquiry commenced I made it my business to write to the four other gentlemen I had the honour to supply. They have each got their respective garment still, and are well satisfied."

"Then," said Mr. Lynton, slowly, "one of these

two coats must be the property of Mr. Buckthorpe, and the other of Fraser Fairhope?"

"That is so," assented the tailor.

"Have you any means by which to distinguish?"

"Certainly; by the number on the tag at the back of the collar."

"Can you tell us what number would have been on Mr. Fairhope's coat?"

Referring to a note-book the witness replied, "The number would be 1134."

"Will you now examine the collar of the coat in your hand, and say if you can make out any number."

The tailor put on his spectacles. "It is a little blurred," he said, "but I think the number is that which I have just read to the court. The jury will be able to judge for themselves."

"Thank you, sir," said Mr. Lynton; "I need not trouble you any further."

There could now be no doubt as to the issue of the trial. The judge hinted to Lynton that he need not occupy too much time with a speech, nor did he himself take long to sum up. Then, without retiring, and after a few brief whispers, the jury returned a verdict of "Not guilty."

In discharging the prisoner the judge expressed his regret that an innocent man should have been put to so much suffering and anxiety. Then he complimented counsel on the able way in which the defence had been worked up, and Cuthbert on the triumphant vindication of his brother that had been achieved by his energy and pluck. Thus the trial, so long looked forward to, came to an end. The court broke up. Fraser was carried

off by his two brothers to the apartment where Hilda was waiting for them. Frank Lynton went to the hotel. Though his victory had been so complete and conspicuous, he felt lonely and downhearted. "I shall go East to-night, and have nothing more to say to these people. They don't want me, and I don't want them," he said to himself as he went to his room.

Later on Donald arrived to say that they all hoped he would join them at dinner; but Lynton declined.

"I feel that I would be in the way, at what ought to be an exclusively family reunion," he said quietly; "besides, I have much business to attend to. I am probably going East to-night."

"Not without seeing my sister—not without wishing us all good-bye!" exclaimed Donald. "How can we ever thank you enough, Lynton—how can we remunerate you for all you have done for us?"

The lawyer laughed dryly. "I am sufficiently remunerated by success," he said. "You see this case has been an advertisement for me. I'm wanted on two or three jobs already, and that even before the result was known for certain. I tell you this Fergie case may be the making of my fortune—or the foundation of it, at all events."

"Well, I do wish you would come and dine with us," urged Donald.

"Can't really, old man. Perhaps we may meet later on, up at the depôt or somewhere. After all, I may not go to-night. Depends on a wire I am expecting from Winnipeg. *Au revoir.*"

The "family reunion" passed off delightfully,

especially in the estimation of the brothers. It was indeed a joy and a cause for thankfulness for the four who had always been so ardently attached to each other to be united once more. They had not sat at the same table since Fraser's last day at Pixley, and then their venerated father had been with them. That thought, recurring at intervals, cast a shade of melancholy over them, though it was powerless to mar their happiness.

"There is one thing," said Fraser, with deep emotion, "that I will never cease to thank God for—that our dear father's dying days were not embittered by a knowledge of the shame that your worthless brother had brought on the name of Fairhope."

"Yes," replied Hilda. "Uncle and I were indeed thankful that he was spared the grief that this—this trouble would have caused him. I knew nothing about it myself till—till all was over. They kept it from me, as they did from him."

A keen sting of pain seemed to shoot through the poor girl's breast as she recalled the two men that constituted the "they" of whom she had spoken—the self-forgetting, kind old man now languishing, or it might be lying dead, in the far-off, frozen North, and the other, the friend whom she seemed to have lost in some strange, unexplained manner, who had been so considerate, tender, and helpful. Perhaps, as often it appears to happen, the thought in her mind affected the others, for all at once Bert exclaimed—

"I must say that lawyer chap Lynton, or whatever you call him, is a brick. You might have been hanged as high as Haman by this time,

Fraser, but for him. He must be an unselfish chap, too; for when I told him I had been robbed of the money Uncle James gave me for him, he didn't seem to mind one little bit; indeed, I could hardly get him to take in what I was saying."

"I wish he was here so that we might pass a formal vote of thanks to him," said Fraser, rather sadly.

"I asked him to join us, but he declined. He seemed to think he'd be one too many at what he called our 'family reunion,'" explained Donald. "Perhaps he thought he ought to have had a formal invitation from the hostess. Anyhow, he was on his high-horse about something."

Feeling that she must say something, Hilda observed quietly—

"Perhaps I ought to have asked him, but I didn't think of it. We must set it right to-morrow before we start for Edmonton."

"I expect we sha'n't see him," said Donald; "he said he thought of going East by to-night's train. But I say, Hilda, is it settled that we are all off to Fairhope to-morrow? Can you manage it? For my part I shall be delighted. There is a lot of work waiting to be done, and, though I say it that oughtn't, the fellows really can't get on without me."

"Yes, I think we had better start at once; there is no use waiting another three days," assented Hilda, drearily. She scarce knew what she was saying or thinking about; she felt vaguely that she was going into a living grave, and she preferred to have the process of interment over as soon as possible.

"You don't seem very enthusiastic about your new communistic home, sister mine," cried Bert. "For my part, I don't believe I shall ever be able to settle down at a place like Fairhope. I shall want to be moving about. Anyhow, as soon as the fine weather comes, I must go and look after poor uncle away there in the frozen North."

"As for me," said Fraser, "no power on earth would induce me to go and live among a lot of people that I know, after the way I have disgraced myself, and all of you. I wonder you could think of it, any of you."

"Oh, nonsense, Fraser!" they exclaimed in chorus. "Of course you will come back with us. You know how glad the people will be to see you, how they will rejoice at your acquittal."

And so, with loving words and tender caresses, they sought to heal his wound and to wipe out the memory of the sad and foolish past. But for that night at least he remained firm in his determination. His heart was very heavy, and his eyes were full of tears, but none the less he kept repeating that no power on earth should induce him to go to Fairhope, where his folly and his shame would be the common talk of all "their people."

So they remonstrated and wept, and planned and talked together, till it was very late. At last they went to bed, leaving everything undecided. For a few hours poor Hilda, having cried herself to sleep, forgot her troubles. Then she woke up suddenly. There seemed to be a certain amount of noise and bustle in the air. She rose and looked out of the window. The moon was at the full, and between her soft light and the electric glare every object

was distinctly visible. She understood the origin of the noise and bustle now that had awoke her. It was four o'clock, and the East-bound train, an hour and a half behind time, was just steaming out of the depôt, and gathering speed for its league-long rush across the prairies.

Hilda Fairhope slept no more that night.





CHAPTER XXXIV.

CLOSING SCENES—THE END.

IT is time to gather up the threads of the various life-histories we have been following throughout these pages, and to make an end.

Fraser remained firm in his determination not to return with Hilda, Donald, and Cuthbert to the Pixley settlement. They waited for the next train three days later in the hope of persuading him ; but they waited in vain. Good came of the delay, however, and the parting, when it took place, was very tender, almost happy. They all noticed that Fraser was very much changed, even during those few days. It was no longer shyness or pride that influenced him, but a certain stern sense of atonement due and of self-restoration to be wrought out.

“It is this way,” he said ; “you would all be too kind to me. I would be tempted to think myself a hero, or at all events an injured innocent. You would share with me such comforts and such alleviations of the settler’s hard lot as you have won to yourselves by months of labour and patient

industry. I have no right to any such share ; it would not be good for me. I must work out my own redemption ; I am determined to do it. Otherwise there can be no self-respect for me ; and not respecting myself, I shall never win the respect of honest men and women."

"Why, Fraser," interrupted the irrepressible Bert, "you speak like a book—like a book full of pictures. Have you been learning up that oration while you've been in quod ?"

Donald took another ground. "You forget, Fraser, what a help you would be to us. You talk about alleviations, but I can tell you there is plenty of hard, rough work to be done yet at Fairhope ; and I'll give you leave to do as much of it as you like."

"And what do you say, Hilda?" inquired Fraser, turning to the sister, who, as the time went on, seemed to take less and less part in the perpetual discussions between the brothers.

"I think that perhaps you are right, Fraser dear," she replied. "I would, of course, like you to come back with us ; but I can quite enter into your feelings—into your desire to punish yourself, and so as it were, by God's gracious help, to redeem the past. Repentance seems a mockery unless one is at least willing to suffer."

That unexpected speech settled the matter. No further remonstrance was attempted. They parted lovingly, tenderly, prayerfully, with brave, loyal hearts, and a good hope for the future.

But there was good fortune in store for poor repentant Fraser Fairhope. After seeing his brothers and sister off by the Edmonton branch, he

was wandering disconsolately about the town, when suddenly he heard himself addressed by name. Looking up, he found himself face to face with Mrs. Fergie and Nellie. After a few words of frank apology for the cruel suspicions of him that she had allowed herself to entertain, the young widow explained that she and her sister-in-law were about to return at once to England. The only difficulty was about the ranch at Smooth Rock. It could not be disposed of at a moment's notice, so they wished to secure the service of a manager. Would Fraser accept the post? He knew something of the duties, she and Nellie could thoroughly trust him to have a care for their interests, and personally she would be glad to offer him some reparation for the grievous wrong that had been done him. The old Indian Moose-jaw thoroughly approved the plan; in fact, it had been partly suggested by him—and as Mrs. Fergie uttered the word “partly,” she could not forbear a sly glance at Nellie, who repaid her with a threatening scowl! For an hour Fraser hesitated. The offer was too good. This was not the way to work out the probation he had set himself; but finally, the ladies representing to him how great was their distress and their horror at the idea of having to return to Smooth Rock, he was obliged to give in. He consented to accept a position in which he knew he would be able to do good work, and in which it would be his constant joy to serve his employers with strenuous devotion. So the matter was settled to everybody's satisfaction. That night the new steward slept at Smooth Rock, and the next day the two ladies had bidden farewell to

the scene of so many trials and sorrows and were on their way to England.

During the next few months the life at Fairhope was sufficiently toilsome and monotonous. Hilda felt that something had been taken out of her life. She fulfilled her duties faithfully, and was, as of old, an object of respect and love to all "her people." She held a little school for the children on Sundays and week-days. She sympathized with all, was doctor to those that needed doctoring, and the especial friend of those who needed befriending. Still, though often forgetting her trouble, she had a perpetual ache at her heart; and such wearying pain could not fail to tell on her once cheerful and healthy face. As for Bert, he was like a caged lion; for though he rode about frantically, and gladly undertook all such tasks as might be an excuse for riding, he was ill at ease. The life, he said, did not suit him, and he talked to the young fellows as though he had been an experienced, weather-hardened traveller for years. Donald, on the whole, did the best. He worked and superintended the work of others with unflagging energy. The climate evidently agreed with him. All the langour of former days disappeared, leaving nothing behind but a polish of politeness and consideration. He grew broad and strong of frame, self-reliant in judgment, and prompt in action; and he was well supported by the chief of the men who had taken part in the Fairhope Venture. There was plenty of hard work, but there was no grumbling to be heard. They laughed at toils and even dangers past, and looked forward with manly hope—the hope that works to

realize its object—to the future. They were a united, simple, God-fearing, law-abiding people; and thus did they “eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.”

With the opening of spring, when “the rending of the frozen chains that bound the glorious rivers in their plains” made travelling in the far North-West something more pleasurable than a fierce struggle against the powers of nature, Bert started off in quest of his uncle. Once only during the winter had a whisper, as it were, come across those terrible ice-bound solitudes. An Indian messenger arrived at Edmonton. He had lost his letters, his dogs, his gun—everything but his life. He had only come from the Landing, but there he had heard say that James Fairhope was still alive, very feeble, but still holding his own. A loving letter from Hilda, and a somewhat patronizing one from Bert, had been entrusted to the return messenger, but when, if at all, they would reach their destination, was a moot point. However, Bert had promised to be at Athabasca Landing as soon as the river was open for navigation, and that promise he now hastened to keep.

In due time Uncle James arrived. Bert would not have known him. The powerful frame had shrunk, the eagle eye was suffused with water, and the once elastic foot now clung heavily to the ground. Instead of looking ten years less than his age, he looked as many older than it now. At first glance Bert was shocked at the change, but when the old man welcomed him, something of the old fire returned to voice and eye and gesture, and for the moment physical infirmities were forgotten.

Next day, seated in a light carriage, and behind a swift and powerful horse, they commenced a pleasant journey.

"Will you drive yourself, uncle?" said Bert, quite respectfully, as he stood by the horse's head.

"No ; I resign in favour of a better man," replied Mr. Fairhope, stepping heavily into his seat.

"Don't say that, sir, please," remonstrated Bert, conscious almost for the first time in his life of a curious choking sensation in his throat.

As they drove along through a pleasant land, Cuthbert told his uncle the story of that memorable winter journey, and the way in which he had been so providentially delivered from danger and brought to a place of safety.

"I hope," cried the old man, fiercely, "that villainous Batiste has received the due reward of his deeds. I know the scamp well. I had the chance to shoot him once, but was fool enough to let it slip ; he went down on his marrow-bones and snivelled, and I was so soft as to let him go."

"Yes, he has met with his reward, but not at the hands of an earthly judge," replied Bert, in a tone of solemnity that was not usual to him. "About ten days after I had the matter reported, he was found dead and frozen about ten miles from Edmonton, but off the track. He had evidently left the two remaining dogs to die, for they were found frozen in their harness along with the sledge. The body of Batiste was found about two miles further on. No doubt he was caught in the same storm that so nearly did for me."

"And you think he robbed you of the money I gave you for Mr. Lynton?"

"There is no doubt of it. The notes were found stowed away in his pocket, and they now lie awaiting identification by you."

"I shall be pleased to identify them," chuckled the old man; "but I'm sorry Batiste should have perished like an honest man. I'd sooner have lost the money and had him decently hanged. An example of that sort is worth a lot in such a country as this every now and then; though I'm free to confess that, bad as the breeds are, there are few as bad right through and through as Batiste was."

In due course, after a rest at Matthew Burrows's place and a day or two among old allies at Edmonton, James Fairhope was brought in triumph to the Pixley settlement by his proud and happy nephew. The old man had not been twenty-four hours in the place before he discovered that there was something wrong with Hilda; nor was he long in deciding what that something was. His very natural and eager inquiries after Frank Lynton met with no satisfactory response.

"He seemed full of business, and in a great hurry to get away," said Donald.

"Probably he was glad to wash his hands of the whole lot of us," opined Bert.

"No, he has not written, nor have we; there was nothing to write about," admitted Hilda, in answer to a direct question.

"It seems to me," exclaimed Uncle James, quite hotly, "that you have all been most ungrateful to my friend, and most neglectful."

"I should be sorry if he thought us ungrateful," said Hilda, in a tremulous voice.

"I wonder what else he can possibly think, my dear," retorted the old man. "But I have some important business to transact with Lynton; and when we meet, I'll let him know what I think about it all. Do you young people know that this man saved your brother's life, and that he saved mine too? No, it was I saved his; but it makes no matter—it's about the same thing for drawing fellows together."

James Fairhope did not lose a day in writing to Mr. Lynton. He said, what was true, that he had important business matters to arrange, and he requested Lynton to meet him as early as possible in the summer, at some central place, such as Winnipeg—unless, indeed, Frank should think of coming even further West.

In due time the lawyer's reply was to hand. Lynton would gladly meet his old friend, and do his utmost to put his business through. He could be in Winnipeg ten days later, but could not get further West, having an engagement across the States' border, at St. Paul.

Mr. Fairhope wired to Montreal that this arrangement would do admirably, and then began to make plans for his own journey.

"I am going to take you with me, Hilda. I am getting too old to travel alone; besides, you don't look well, and I *know* the change will do you good."

The girl remonstrated, hesitated, never more than half consented; but the upshot was that the eve of the appointed day found her and her uncle comfortably established at Leyland House, Winnipeg.

Next afternoon the lawyer appeared. As he

had to start for St. Paul next morning, he had not much time to lose. There was a good deal to do—a will to be executed, and other legal matters to be discussed. Still, when men mean business, work can be accomplished quickly, and Lynton was a little puzzled to find his old friend in such a state of nervous hurry as he seemed to be.

“Are you alone, Mr. Fairhope?” he asked, as he noted the trembling hand and faltering voice.

“No; my niece Hilda has kindly taken charge of me. She is in the drawing-room, and you must go and see her as soon as we have had another word or two together.”

“Miss Fairhope! And does she—does she know that I am here?” gasped Lynton.

“Of course she knows you are here; she knows I came to meet you, though the poor dear has no idea of my real business.”

“I suppose she would scarcely care to understand it,” said the young man, for want of something better to say.

James Fairhope burst into a hearty laugh. “Wouldn’t she, though? You bet she can tell you more about it than I can. See, my friend; you don’t imagine I’ve brought you all these hundreds of miles, and travelled nearly as far myself, just to get my will made, and to discuss those twopenny-halfpenny papers? It is not like the old man, is it?”

“Hardly, perhaps;” and Frank Lynton’s rising colour indicated a dawning perception of the realities of the situation.

“Well, then, you and the girl settle your business together while I have a smoke at the bar, and then,

if you are good children, I'll take you to see where old Fort Garry used to stand, and we'll look in at the Hudson Bay stores on the way."

And now the tale is ended. Cuthbert, scorning the delights of civilization, or even of semi-civilization, has obtained, through his uncle's influence, a post under the great Company that once ruled alone in the solitudes of the vast North-West. He is about to start, with Yellow Paw for a companion, for a fort where he will be fifteen hundred miles from anywhere particular, and he is unboundedly happy and bumptious at the prospect.

George Page is equally happy, though in more stolid fashion, in the hope of an early union with Esther Marsh. They are to live with Mr. and Mrs. Burrows, and will be the inheritors of the not inconsiderable property accumulated by a brave, God-fearing man in the course of an industrious life.

A very advantageous sale of Smooth Rock ranch was effected by Fraser in the course of a few months. Business in connection with the transfer took him to England. When he returned to Canada, later on, it was with Nellie Fergie as his wife. They are about to settle in the Red Deer district, so as to be near the friends at Fairhope.

And Fairhope, too, is flourishing. It presents the picture of a united, helpful community—without communism. Each helps the other, but each man respects his own independence and that of his neighbour. There is emulation, but no rivalry; strenuous endeavour, but no merciless competition. It is not child's play; but these people did not go

out five thousand miles from home to play at being settlers. They went out to found enduring homes for themselves, and, yet more, for those that should come after them; and by the good hand of God upon them, they bid fair to flourish.

Just now, however, Fairhope is somewhat troubled. Donald is the acknowledged "head man" of the place. They say he will live and die an old bachelor—or rather, that he is already wedded to the little community of which he is the centre. But Fairhope is about to be deprived of its queen. Hilda is to be married in a few weeks. Frank Lynton having obtained a Government appointment in British Columbia, she will cross the glorious snow-capped mountains, and make her new home on the Pacific slope—probably in beautiful, England-like Victoria. Uncle James is to have his home with the Lyntons—his headquarters, rather, for he declares that so long as the use of his limbs is spared to him, he will keep moving.

Of Richard Buckthorpe nothing definite was ever heard. About a year after his disappearance from Calgary, a man was shot in connection with a train robbery in the States. He was an Englishman, and from the description given Frank Lynton concluded that he was no other than the unfortunate nephew of the old squire of High Pixley. Lynton put away the paper and said nothing to his wife about the sad affair.

Thus far, it may be said, the Fairhope Venture has been a success. None that put their hand to *that* plough have looked back, or desired to look back. They have not forgotten the dear old home;

they have not forgotten the kindly provision made for their comfort and spiritual welfare during the voyage out ; they have not forgotten the fatigues of the long journey, nor the hardships incident to the settler's early struggles. But, remembering all these things, they thank God to-day, and take courage for the future. A little wooden church is rising in the midst of the village, and may be distinguished from the railway track several miles away. In the late summer a fresh batch of immigrants is expected from the neighbourhood of High Pixley, and minute directions have been given as to the direction in which the new arrivals are to keep a sharp look-out for a first glimpse of the unpretentious heaven-pointing spire that is by that time to mark, on a gentle slope, the site of the rising village of Fairhope.

THE END.



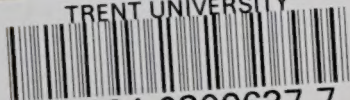
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